

December 2016



ABC

Gardening

AUSTRALIA

ALL RISE!
Raised vegie
beds to buy
& make

50 garden
jobs to do
this month

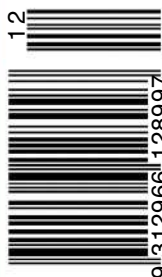
Growing tips:

- Peanuts
- Cucumber
- Rex begonia

All I want for CHRISTMAS

Costa & the crew share their Santa wish lists

ONLY \$6.99



Josh Byrne
Easy irrigation
upkeep & new
technologies



John Patrick
8 top ideas for
an Australian
Christmas tree

VISIT...

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Caliente.COM

HOLMAN

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HOLMAN Retractable Hose Reels are available in 10m, 20m & 30m and feature the unique hose locking mechanism. Stop the hose in any position you want. Tidy up your hose and protect it from the tough Australian sun.

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editor's letter



merry christmas

Well, another year is drawing to a close, and presents, pudding recipes and tree selection are on the radar for those of us who do Christmas. At my place, we fold out the large, artificial tree, and layer it with the decorations collected over many years, some since I was a girl. My kids have always been allowed to choose one new decoration to buy each year, and with each of them now teenagers, we have a bauble or two.

But I would also like to have a living mini-tree set up where we will eat on the day, and there could be none better than the little cutie I'm holding in the shot above (also on our cover). It's a baby woolly bush (*Adenanthos sericeus*), bought to provide screening and structure at the back of a bed of natives, but I might hold off putting it in the ground and pot it up for Christmas instead. John Patrick runs through more excellent native Christmas tree options on page 20, and the presenters share what they're hoping a gardening-oriented Santa might bring them (page 16). If you're bereft of ideas for the gardener in your life, check out the botanic-themed gift guide on page 12.

Water – too much, too little – is always an issue for gardeners, and we thought it was time to go back to basics with some practical advice on water usage and irrigation (pages 38 & 43). And if you have a swimming pool that no one loves anymore, turn to page 46 for some clever ideas for transforming your pool into a pond or garden. It's often cheaper and certainly more ingenious than having the shell demolished.

We have some exciting stories planned for next year, and I know our TV counterparts are busy filming great stuff for when the show returns in March. For now, have a very happy Christmas and New Year.

Jennifer



FESTIVE SPIRITS

Main Costa with some of the magazine team: Lili Zhan, Ally Jackson, Jenny Baldwin and Karen Stewart.

Above Thank you Chilli for wandering into our photo shoot!

Contact Us



on Facebook at facebook.com/ABCgardeningAustraliaMagazine and Instagram @gardeningaustraliomag to keep up to date with the latest gardening news and to see some great photos.



Share your stories, tips, photos and opinions with us. Write to Your Say, Gardening Australia, nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards NSW 1590 or email yoursay@gardeningaustralia.com.au

Create a garden your family will enjoy all summer long

At the world famous garden of **HERONSWOOD** we have been growing tough summer perennials that survive 40°C and look good from December until April.

Rarely available in nurseries, these first class, toughened perennials are available to Diggers Club members online and at our garden shops, located in our gardens. Unlike "potted colour" our perennials thrive year after year. Come and visit our gardens, enjoy lunch (inside historic Heronswood house) and shop in beautiful surroundings.

If you want to create art by planting, join our Club — it's just \$49 for one year!

Heronswood's summer border after four days above 40°C ►



Pink Evening Primrose



Delphinium Blue Sensation



Achillea Hella Glashoff



Agastache Blue Fortune



Pink Statice



Clive Blazey

"I was inspired to write my new book, *There Is No Excuse For Ugliness*, to help people create a summer garden that is cool and refreshing during the hottest of Australian summers," says author Clive Blazey.

Clive and the Diggers staff created the gardens at Heronswood and St Erth after travelling the world in search of the best plants and gardens. The **PLANT SELECTOR** is Australia's most complete list of herbs, perennials, roses, bulbs, annuals, trees and shrubs that are anything but commonplace and includes detailed growing descriptions for gardeners from Cairns to Hobart.

This is a book for both the beginner and the experienced gardener that explains the basics of garden botany for gardening success. **RRP \$29.95** (just \$19.95 with a two year membership).



Pick up your plants at Diggers Garden Shops



HERONSWOOD DROMANA

105 Latrobe Parade, Dromana, 3936, VIC
Garden Shop: 03 5984 7321

ST ERTH BLACKWOOD

189 Simmons Reef Road, Blackwood, 3458, VIC
Garden Shop: 03 5368 6514

CLOUDEHILL OLINDA

89 Olinda-Monbulk Road, Olinda, VIC, 3788
Garden Shop: 03 9751 0584

ADELAIDE BOTANIC GARDEN

Schomburgk Pavilion, North Terrace
Adelaide, 5000, SA
Garden Shop: 08 8232 8671

Join THE DIGGERS CLUB

We are Australia's most popular garden magazine and our club has more members than our leading AFL club. Our members are inspired by visiting three of Australia's finest summer gardens with espalier orchards and sub-tropical food borders full of heirloom produce.

We trial and grow more food plants and summer perennials than any other supplier in Australia. We can show you how to grow heirloom vegetables, space saving dwarf fruit trees, and rare herbs like capers and wasabi, all delicious varieties, full of fibre and free of nasty chemicals. If your garden looks dull and drab in summer we can help you create a garden you will be proud of.

8 magazines a year

Innovative, informative and provocative ideas about how to be self-sufficient in a tiny mini-plot space or country orchard, whether your garden is in tropical Darwin or cold Hobart.



Over 30 different berries



Biggest citrus range



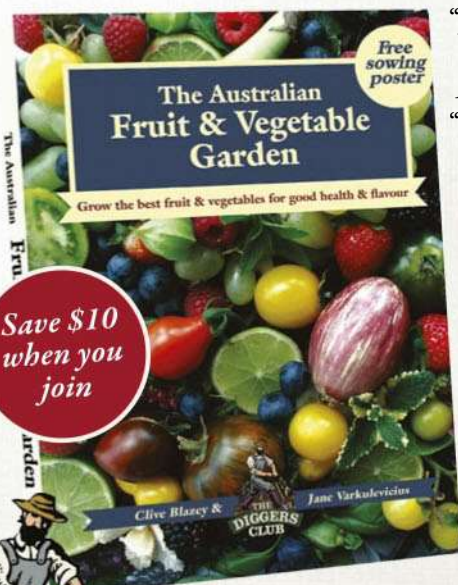
Dwarf avocados too!



Over 40 heirloom tomatoes



Tropical fruits



"Just 5 hours gardening a week is all it takes to grow your tomatoes, avocados, citrus and flowers, if you follow our advice from our best selling Diggers book *The Australian Fruit & Vegetable Garden*" says founder of The Diggers Club Clive Blazey.

"Grow heirloom fruit and vegetables organically — our varieties are full of fibre, never tasteless or bland like supermarket produce. All plants are sent directly to your door from our mail order nursery."

Membership options

- ☐ One year \$49.00
☐ Two years (SAVE \$29.00) \$69.00

Special book offer when you join for 2 years!

- ☐ *The Australian Fruit & Vegetable Garden* (RRP \$39.95) \$29.95
☐ *There Is No Excuse For Ugliness* (RRP \$29.95) \$19.95
☐ Book postage \$8.95

Total

\$

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Address _____

Postcode _____

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Phone (____) _____

Charge my ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa

Expiry ☐ ☐ Signature _____

Code: PG12

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 Phone: 03 5984 7900
 Email: info@diggers.com.au

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EDITOR Jenny Baldwin
DEPUTY EDITOR Karen Stewart
ART DIRECTOR Lili Zhan
HORTICULTURAL EDITOR Phil Dudman
ASSISTANT HORTICULTURAL EDITOR Ally Jackson
SUBEDITOR Gina Hetherington

ABC TV HOST Costa Georgiadis
PRESENTERS Josh Byrne, Tino Carnevale,
 Jerry Coleby-Williams, Jane Edmanson, John Patrick,
 Clarence Stockee, Angus Stewart, Sophie Thomson
CONTRIBUTORS Steve Ball, Noel Burdette, Paul Chapman,
 Karyn Couper-Smith, Leonard Cronin, Sandra Eterovic,
 Jackie French, Robert Frith, Arno King, Michael McCoy,
 Debbie McDonald, Marcelle Nankervis, Cheryl Orsini,
 Martyn Robinson, Jennifer Stackhouse, Dr Erica Steppat,
 Jac Taylor, Kim Woods Rabbidge

ADVERTISING SALES
GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGER
 Lynette Rochford, lrochford@nextmedia.com.au
 Phone (02) 9901 6371

DIRECTORIES ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
 Alora Edwards, aedwards@nextmedia.com.au
 Phone (02) 9901 6101

ACCOUNT MANAGER
 Annya Azzopardi, aazzopardi@nextmedia.com.au
 Phone (02) 9901 6320

ADVERTISING MANAGER - VIC
 Georgia Falcke, gfalcke@nextmedia.com.au
 Phone (03) 9804 3418

PRODUCTION MANAGER Peter Ryman
PRODUCTION AND DIGITAL SERVICES MANAGER
 Jonathan Bishop

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Carole Jones
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ABC TV Tarni James
SERIES PRODUCER ABC TV Gill Lomas
HEAD OF SALES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
ABC COMMERCIAL Sharon Ramsay-Luck
MAGAZINE COORDINATOR ABC COMMERCIAL
 Lisa Hunter

SUBSCRIPTIONS gardeningaustralia.com.au

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES
 yoursay@gardeningaustralia.com.au
 Phone (02) 9901 6325

NEXT MEDIA PTY LTD
 Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards NSW 1590
 Phone (02) 9901 6100

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER David Gardiner
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR Bruce Duncan

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nextmedia



DECEMBER contents



on the cover

Santa is coming to town, and he's laden with gardening goodies. Costa Georgiadis holds a baby woolly bush (*Adenanthos sericeus*), one of the native species that make great Christmas trees. For more native tree ideas, see page 20.

Photo: Craig Wall

Stylist: Rhianne Contreras

Location: Honeysuckle Garden Mosman

Santa's helper: Chilli the Japanese spitz

Styling: gold star by Papier d'Amour; baubles by Chas Clarkson; ribbon and wrapping paper by Vadoros Fine Packaging; reindeer, birds and copper star decorations by Florabelle.



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what's on in December



New South Wales

1st Dec–31st Jan Clyde River Berry Farm

10am–5pm (closed Christmas Day). Lot 22, River Rd, Mogood. (02) 4478 1057. Each day, visitors can pick blueberries, strawberries and varieties of blackberries (subject to seasonal variation). The farm is located down an unsealed road and can be hard to find using GPS, so call or check the website for directions. clyderiverberryfarm.com.au

3rd Aboriginal Bush Food Experience

12–4pm. Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, Mrs Macquaries Rd, Sydney. (02) 9231 8111. \$80. Join Aboriginal guides to discover how native bush foods can be incorporated with everyday ingredients. Gather seasonal fruits, seeds, berries and native vegetables and plants using a traditional coolamon, before preparing and tasting recipes.

3rd–11th Plants With Bite

Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm. Weekends 9.30am–5.30pm. Blue Mountains Botanic Garden Mount Tomah, Bells Line of Rd, Mount Tomah. (02) 4567 3000. Free exhibition (\$15 per event). Enjoy the Carnivorous Plant Emporium exhibition at the Visitor Centre to learn how some plants have adapted to become carnivorous. During the week, special events include a workshop on growing and propagating carnivorous plants, and a guided walking tour of the bog garden.

Linda Trikarso's Open Garden



3rd–18th Gardenalia Open Garden

Sat–Sun 10am–4pm (open by appointment only on weekdays). 5 May St, Robertson. 0477 213141. \$8. Visit this 0.4ha garden showcasing more than 680 potted plants, plus a Japanese garden, large vegie garden, chooks and aviaries. Plants are also for sale, all propagated on site.

10th Green Living Workshop

9am–12pm. The Coast Christian School, 39 Bundaleer Cres, Bensville. (02) 4325 8399. Free (open to local council residents only). Learn the tips and tricks of composting and worm farming to recycle your food waste into nutrient-rich fertiliser. After completing the workshop, each attending local household receives a free compost bin or worm farm. Booking essential.

Tasmania

3rd Circular Head Show

8am–4pm. Stanley Recreation Ground, Marine Esplanade, Stanley. 0456 003 609. \$10. Following the official opening ceremony and Grand Parade, enjoy cattle and equestrian competitions, agricultural machinery displays, food stalls, cooking demonstrations, live music, sideshows and a host of family-friendly activities.

28th Dec–3rd Jan Taste of Tasmania

11am–11pm. Princes Wharf 1, Castray Esplanade, Hobart. (03) 6238 2410. Free. Treat your tastebuds to fresh produce from all regions of Tasmania, and enjoy live music, street performers and children's activities. On New Year's Eve, a ticketed party is taking place from 6pm. thetasteoftasmania.com.au

Victoria

3rd Linda Trikarso's Open Garden

12–4pm. 5 Woolcock Close, Burwood. 0418 110 345. Free. Wander around the suburban garden lovingly created by Linda Trikarso, winner of the regular-sized garden category in our very own 2016 Gardener of the Year



South Australia

3rd–4th Open gardens

10am–4.30pm. Various locations. 0410 755 514. \$8 per garden. Two gardens are open to visitors. Kurrawirra, in Aldgate, offers gardens, woodlands and a recently expanded orchard area. In Bridgewater, Beverina's 5ha of grounds include two lakes, a stream and a landscaped dam. Dogs are welcome at both venues, and visitors can bring along their own picnics.



competition. Visitors can talk to Linda about the projects she has completed in her garden over the years and ask questions about her plant and design choices.

Western Australia

2nd–3rd Osborne Park Show

Fri 5–10pm. Sat 10am–10pm. Robinson Reserve, Royal St, Tuart Hill. 0419 997 171. \$10 (daytime), \$15 (evenings). Enjoy exhibitions of animals, produce, and arts and crafts, as well as log-chopping, sideshows and family entertainment. Catch the fireworks display each night at 9pm. opas.org.au

7th Dig it with Coffee

9.45am–12pm. Zamia Cafe, 50 May Dr, Kings Park, Perth. (08) 9480 3672. Free. Receive gardening advice on growing Western Australian native plants at home from Kings Park's horticulturists and a team of volunteer Master Gardeners. Refreshments are available at the cafe.

10th Manjimup Cherry Harmony Festival

9am–4pm. Various locations in central Manjimup. 0427 712 316. Free. Celebrate the arrival of the cherry season, with events including a cherry-pip spitting

tell us about your event

The March calendar deadline is November 28, 2016. Send event details (date, opening times, location, cost and phone number) to Shows, Gardening Australia, nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards NSW 1590 or email shows@gardeningaustralia.com.au

competition, vehicle procession, cooking demonstrations, log chopping, street theatre and live music. There's also food from the Southern Forests region for sale. Special guests include 720 ABC Perth's gardening expert, Sabrina Hahn. An evening concert starts at 6pm in Manjin Park.



Queensland

17th Christmas clay play pottery

10am–12pm. Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mt Coot-tha, Mt Coot-tha Rd, Toowong. 0411 246 487. \$5. Learn how to make bowls and vases, and go on a nature walk around the garden, collecting leaves and twigs to add textures to the clay. Suitable for ages five and up. Booking essential.



Australian Capital Territory

1st–17th Sunset Cinema

8.15pm–late. Australian National Botanic Gardens, Clunies Ross St, Acton. (02) 6250 9588. \$19. Watch a selection of newly released and classic films, screened in the surrounds of the Eucalypt Lawn – including period drama *The Light Between Oceans*, set in Western Australia. Bring your own rugs and cushions, or hire a beanbag, bean-lounger or backrest. Tickets available online. sunsetcinema.com.au

on the Grapevine

Go behind-the-scenes at our Gardener of the Year presentation at Floriade, plus other gardening news



It was all smiles and a little bit of shivering at the Gardener of the Year ceremony in Canberra, writes **JENNY BALDWIN**

It was one of the wettest, coldest Floriades on record, but spirits were high as the four winners in the 2016 Gardener of the Year competition converged on the flower show in Canberra to collect their prizes and see who had taken out the Golden Spade.

There was Joanne Muscat, winner of the tiny garden section; Linda Trikarso, regular-sized garden; Bill Mitchell, large garden; and Shirley Johnson, community garden. Shirley triumphed as the overall Gardener of the Year for her guerrilla gardening in North Fitzroy, Melbourne.

Those of us from the magazine were excited to meet these four people, whose faces and gardens we had been poring over for weeks. We huddled with them in the warmth of the cafe and shivered with them among the tulips, but it was all smiles on stage in the Floral Emporium, where the presentation unfolded.

With us were special guests Andrew Forster, head gardener of Floriade, and presenter John Patrick from the TV show, both of whom brought fun and frivolity to proceedings. John was found crashed

out on a lounge in the Floriade site office, jetlagged from a month leading garden tours in France (someone has to do it). Jetlag did nothing to dent his penchant for outrageous jokes, and he did play a key role in stopping the Gardener of the Year banner flying away during the photos.

Friendships were quickly formed, and it was agreed that the warmth shared among the group was due to gardeners being such exceptionally good people! For more about the winners, see the November issue. Back issues available on 1300 361 146.



SIMPLY THE BEST
Clockwise from left Editor Jenny Baldwin and TV show presenter John Patrick with their favourite coloured tulips; head gardener Andrew Forster weighs up which tie – pumpkins or seed packets?; John steadies the banner during photo time; the four winners (from left) Linda, Shirley, Joanne and Bill; Shirley receives her Golden Spade from Jenny and horticultural editor Phil Dudman; the main prize included a trip for two to the Chelsea Flower Show; words of thanks from Shirley; the presentation kicked off with a Q&A with the magazine's Ally Jackson, John, Andrew and Phil.

garden news



impact of climate change

Research published in *Nature Climate Change* shows that a rise in temperature of 3°C over the next 60 years would see the numbers of black box, mountain ash and jarrah eucalypts halved in Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. While other species will reforest these areas, biodiversity will be affected as the vegetation becomes more homogenous.

spot the daisy

It's easy now to find insecticides that contain plant-based Australian Natural Pyrethrins (ANP) by looking for the new 'daisy mark' logo on the products. Extracted from pyrethrum daisies sustainably grown by Australian farmers, ANP is the active ingredient in a wide range of products targeting insects such as mozzies, head lice and garden bugs, as well as flea and tick treatments for pets. It leaves no lasting pesticide residues.



CONGRATS!

The Forest Edge Garden in the Lower Hunter Valley, NSW has won a National Award of Excellence in the Gardens category in AILA's National Landscape Architecture Awards. Natural materials, mass plantings of grasses and other native species, and a light touch with the design make for a garden that sits in remarkable sympathy with the surrounding bushland, and will eventually meld with it. The garden was designed by Jane Irwin Landscape Architecture.





Special somethings

for the gardener in your life

'Indoor Combination'
vertical or desktop
planter by MiPlant
\$24.95 each,
bunnings.com.au
(03) 8831 9777
(available
end Nov)



'Flower' bowls
by French Knot
\$8.95 each,
frenchknot.com.au
(02) 9146 4720



'Blood Orange
and Grapefruit
Body Bar' by Mozi
\$12.95, mozi.com.au
(03) 9838 2480





'Wild Collection'
shopping bags
by Loqi \$15 each,
petersofkensington.com.au
(02) 9662 1433

A Year in the Garden
Colouring Book by
Clair Rossiter \$19.99,
bloomsbury.com/au
(02) 8820 4900



'Men's Enamel Mug'
by Ted Baker \$29.95,
until.com.au
(02) 9119 8700



Organic herbal teas by Tè
From \$9.50 each,
tetea.com.au

under \$50



'Tropical Fixie
Pizza Cutter -
Patterned'
by Doiy \$31.99,
mightyape.com.au



'Daisy Lid - Medium'
by Charles Viancin
\$24.95,
charlesviancin.com.au
(02) 9476 4339



GIFT GUIDE

\$50 to \$100



'Best Friends'
hanging vase
by Kirraleandco
\$60, [etsy.com/au/
shop/kirraleandco](https://www.etsy.com/au/shop/kirraleandco)



'Paradise' linen
apron by Utopia
Goods \$79,
[utopiagoods.com](https://www.utopiagoods.com)
(02) 9699 9710

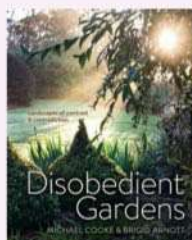


'Chinese Peony' doormat
by FrenchKnot Designs
\$59.95, [frenchknot.com.au](https://www.frenchknot.com.au)
(02) 9146 4720



Cushions by
Bonnie And Neil
From \$155 each,
[bonnieandneil.com.au](https://www.bonnieandneil.com.au)
(03) 9384 2234

books



Disobedient Gardens by Michael Cooke & Brigid Arnott

Murdoch Books

After surviving a near-fatal accident, designer Michael Cooke spent his convalescence creating a book that shares his landscaping philosophy. *Disobedient Gardens* takes readers on a tour around five gardens designed by Cooke and photographed by Brigid Arnott. Each space has its own personality, displaying order alongside a degree of 'restrained wildness'. Cooke's gardens are not overstyled, showing how simple layers and textures can create striking landscapes.



Loose Leaf by Wona Bae & Charlie Lawler

Hardie Grant Books

In their first book, Wona Bae and Charlie Lawler describe 12 botanical art projects, based on unique sculptures and installations created by florist and artist, Wona Bae. Each section has step-by-step instructions, outlining the tools and materials needed to create a number of items, including seasonal wreaths, orbs, nests and hanging gardens. There's also a useful beginners' guide to propagating an *Epipremnum aureum*.

more than \$100



'Wattle Grey Silk
Crepe de Chine' scarf
by Utopia Goods
\$149, utopiagoods.com
(02) 9699 9710



'Jungle Palm' wallpaper
by Kingdom Home
\$218 per roll,
kingdomhome.com.au
0404 882 663

'Botanica Maple
Rain Umbrella' by
Basil Bangs \$149,
basilbangs.com
(02) 9938 4759



***The Birdman's
Wife* by Melissa
Ashley**

Affirm Press

This novel shines a
light on artist Elizabeth
Gould, whose detailed
illustrations featured in

her husband John's ornithological bible, *The Birds of Australia*. Inspired by her own letters, the book explores how an adventurous and talented woman lived in the shadows of her husband, trying to balance her groundbreaking work with her role as a wife and mother.



***Paul Bangay's
Country
Gardens* by
Paul Bangay**
Lantern

Step inside 20
graceful country
gardens created

by landscape designer Paul Bangay. The author describes his concept for each garden alongside beautiful photography by Simon Griffiths. This is an inspiring book which showcases elegant plant and colour combinations, great design advice and impressive sculptural elements.



***Flora: An
Artistic Voyage
through the
World of Plants*
by Sandra
Knapp**

Murdoch Books

In this informative

book, botanist Sandra Knapp profiles 20 plant groups, including cactuses, irises, waterlilies, roses and tulips. Each essay is illustrated with artwork from the archives of Britain's Natural History Museum. The book is part of a box set, with 36 frameable prints from the museum's collections.

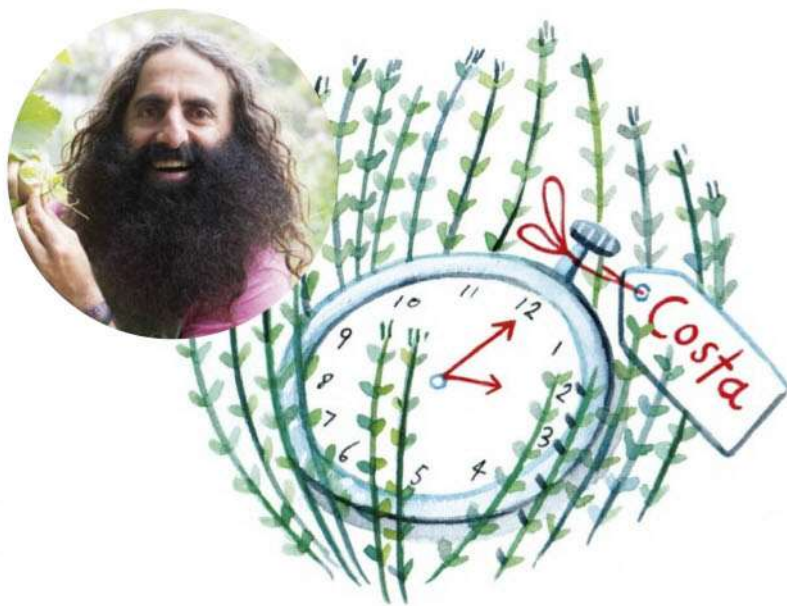


I'm dreaming of...

We asked the TV presenters what they'd like to see under the tree this year

Costa Georgiadis

I'd like some thyme plants to kickstart a thyme garden, like the one I planted recently at Horsham West Primary School in Victoria. We planted 23 varieties – and if just one of those thyme plants gave me an extra hour a day, that would make roughly an extra day a month. And I reckon I could put that to good use!



Sophie Thomson

I'm hoping the railway carriage my husband bought me this year as a Valentine's present arrives in time for Christmas! We were meant to pick it up from a farm an hour or two away, but we failed to get it from the paddock before the rains. Then, the day we were set to go, the crane truck we were borrowing from a neighbour had a mechanical failure. Hopefully, it will be here for Christmas. This carriage will be my third and I have plans to convert it into an all-weather potting shed. The first one is used as a chook house, and the second one, called Mum's Shed, houses my tools. I'd also rather like a poly house with about eight wicking beds in it, to grow ginger, turmeric and winter tomatoes.



Tino Carnevale

My wish for Christmas is for a fancy new wheelbarrow. By 'fancy', I mean something with a wheel! I live on a sloping site and I've lugged my broken, heavy, splintery barrow up and down and up and down for years. But the running repairs that have kept it going so long have run out. Old faithful and I first met on a building site, and we hit it off straightaway. It had worked with an old builder and had then been passed down to his apprentice, then to my brother-in-law, then to me. We have moved a lot of materials together in that time, and it's with a tinge of sadness that I'll see it retire. But it will not be forgotten. It will take pride of place under the apple tree, planted out with a lovely crop of strawberries.



Angus Stewart

I know it won't fit in my stocking, Santa, but I'm starting a new garden and I really want to plant my favourite Christmas tree under the living room window. It is a red-flowering gum that will hopefully bloom every year with little red decorations on every branch. The one I really want is a dwarf variety called *Corymbia ficifolia* 'Baby Scarlet', which will not be too heavy for the elves to get onto the sled. It is one of my favourites because it has vivid, bright red flowers that generally appear from Christmas to Australia Day, on a compact-growing specimen that is 2–3 metres tall. It is ideally suited to southern Australia, where the low humidity in summer helps keep the tree free of leaf-spotting fungi. As with all grafted plants, I'll need to remove any suckers from below the graft union, trim off the spent flowers and feed at the same time with native plant fertiliser, to make sure that I have a spectacular display next year.



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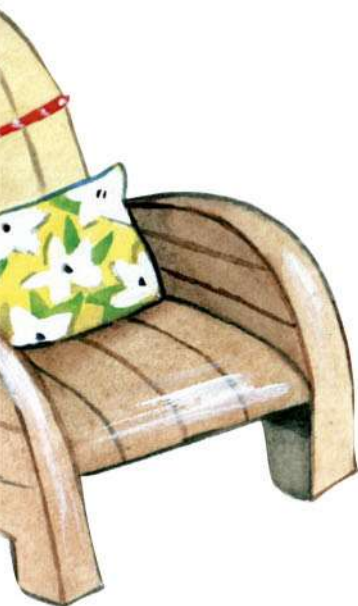
Josh Byrne

If there's one thing that I really want for Christmas this year, it's a good garden chair. This might seem like a straightforward thing to have, but the perfect one can be hard to find. It needs to be just right – inviting enough to make me want to stop, sit and slow down; a place to read a book, or to think about what jobs need doing in the garden; durable enough to cop the weather; sturdy enough to have the kids climb over it; and comfy enough for me to be able to settle in and nod off from time to time. Perfect.



John Patrick

Sicily is synonymous with vegetables. The market stalls there abound with delicious produce piled higher than stalls anywhere else, and produce looks healthy, delicious and so tasty. During a recent visit, my eye was drawn to round, shiny, purple eggplants. They're called *melanzana* in Italian, a corruption from the term *mela insana*, meaning 'apple of insanity'. This is what the Romans thought, seeing these glorious purple fruits for the first time, as Jews deported from Sicily carried them to Rome. The round eggplants of Sicily are perfect in shape, form, colour and flavour. I'm not difficult to please – half a dozen would make me very happy!



Jane Edmanson

If I said that I would like a plant called *Commiphora myrrha* for Christmas, I would be asking for the impossible dream. I am fascinated by this plant, it being the 'myrrh' of 'gold, frankincense and myrrh'. It's a thorny, straggly looking tree that originates from the desert of Yemen, and is now near extinction in the wild. Its sticky resin is used for incense and perfume-making. It has an amazing fragrance, but I can't imagine ever being able to grow a tree like this in southern Victoria. To be more realistic, all I really want for Christmas are a few top-ups for my herb collection: dill, which will self-seed here, there and everywhere, and chervil, with its aniseed fragrance. I would like a 'Silver Posy' thyme and a new common sage (*Salvia officinalis*), as my old one grew too woody over many years and I miss the aromatic grey-green leaves. It is so good for chicken stuffing or cutting for a posy. Or, of course, the king of summer herbs, a little plant or two of basil. Herbs come into their own at this time of year, and just a pinch of a leaf gives endless pleasure. And they're much easier to grow than the fascinating myrrh plant!





Aussie O↑CHRISTMAS TREE...!



Dressing a living tree in colourful tinsel and baubles is part of the Christmas fun, and there are great Aussie alternatives to traditional pine trees. JOHN PATRICK looks into some options

The recent announcement of a South Pole franchise of Santa's workshop promises several changes in present delivery this year with faster, earlier deliveries, kangaroos in place of reindeer, and a different group of elf assistants. But perhaps the biggest change is Santa's desire to see Australian natives take centre stage as the preferred Christmas tree.

Santa has expressed the view that Southern Hemisphere vegetation is perfect in his eyes, and suggests we pick one of our fine Aussie natives for him to leave his gifts beneath.

tall & handsome

A Christmas tree needs to look good in a pot, have branches that can carry decorations, be able to tolerate shade for the 12 days of Christmas when it is indoors, and probably tolerate neglect while the family pops down to the beach in January. After its time as a Christmas tree, it should also be able to be planted in the garden or remain as a handsome long-term potted plant.

With those requirements in mind, woolly bush (*Adenanthos sericeus*) is ideal, not least because its silvery, rather woolly foliage is perfect to carry red Christmas balls. There are well-sized specimens available in most garden centres. Look for them in cheery red pots, as befits the Christmas theme.

After its stint indoors, woolly bush has a striking landscape presence and is long-lived in climates

with low humidity. Plant it as a feature plant in full sun in well-drained soil (it doesn't enjoy heavy clay soils). Its potential height is 3m, but in the garden it remains smaller and its woolly branches can be clipped to any height.

When I left England, one of my more generous gestures was to leave my Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) in a pot beside the television for my mother to enjoy. After 15 years in Australia without going home, I had visions of it growing through the roof of her single-storey home, with a TV aerial on the top!

Sensibly, Mum got rid of the plant before it had a chance to destroy her house, but these native trees do make really good indoor pot plants while young, and can serve for many years as a Christmas tree in a pot, with baubles and silver tinsel added in the festive season. If you want to be one up on your friends, forgo the partridge (in the pear tree) and add a pair of fairy terns nesting on an upper branch. Perhaps that's best left to Norfolk Island folk!

Norfolk Island pines can be planted out very successfully, but in most cases it isn't a good plan as these stately trees grow 60m high with an 8m spread. Keep them contained and don't be tempted to plant one in a courtyard or even a suburban backyard, although they are ideal beside the sea. Native to the windswept, isolated island whose name they carry, they have great salt tolerance.





JUST ADD TINSEL

Left Wollemi pine can grow up to 20m high, but a young one in a pot makes a good Christmas tree. Below The soft-textured, upright stems of woolly bush are perfect to hang baubles on.



"Wollemi pine looks the part with a glass of milk (or brandy) nearby"

Any native plant with pine-like leaves is worth consideration, and I can't ignore pineleaf geebung (*Persoonia pinifolia*). Not only does this shrub have appropriate foliage and branching, it also produces bright yellow flowers throughout summer, which may mean a saving on gold baubles – just top it with a sparkly angel.

After Christmas, it fits easily into any garden with well-drained soils. Choose a lightly shaded spot where you can enjoy its remarkable floral display through summer and the early weeks of autumn. Shiny green berries follow the flowers. Expect this geebung to grow at least 3m high and wide. Prune to shape if you desire.

Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is another pine look-alike that warrants consideration for a living Christmas tree. This isn't a true pine but is closely related to the araucarias. It looks the part, however, and with a glass of milk (or brandy) and a plate of mince pies nearby, Santa will have no trouble identifying it as the ideal spot to leave his gifts. ►

PHOTOS ALICIA TAYLOR, ALAMY, ANGUS STEWART



NATIVE TREES

BRIGHT & BUSHY

From left Norfolk Island pine; *Syzygium smithii* 'Fire Screen' is another good option; Jane Edmanson with a pineleaf geebung – it can be trimmed to size in a pot; swap the partridge for a galah... in a New South Wales Christmas bush.



A young Wollemi pine in a pot is a perfect indoor Christmas tree, and gift, as this endangered native tree has excellent shade tolerance (it can suffer scorch in hot sun). It tolerates cold – not Antarctic cold, but it's sufficiently tolerant to use in Tasmania and other cool-temperate areas as a rewarding long-term outdoor garden plant in well-drained soil, or grown in a raised bed or mound. Trees in the wild eventually reach 20m high but can be kept smaller in a large container or in the garden, and they can also be pruned.

green & red foliage

Traditionalists may prefer their Christmas tree to look like a pine, but as I am not traditional, here are a few non pine-looking plants that can also be used post Christmas in the garden. Keeping future use in mind, it is hard to pass up red-foliaged lillypillies, which are ideal screening plants that clip well.

A specimen of the dwarf lillypilly 'Tiny Trev' (*Syzygium australe* 'Tiny Trev'), clipped and grown in a pot outdoors, could have many years of service as a Christmas tree. It could also be used as a table centrepiece, or as a temporary ornamental feature

"Your tree should be able to be planted in the garden or remain as a handsome potted plant"

in a hall all year round. It grows to a compact 0.5–1.2m in a pot or in the ground, where it can be formed as a low hedge or a clipped shrub, with attractive flushes of orange-red new growth. It grows well in all areas.

Perhaps the best lillypilly for foliage colour is 'Royal Flame' (*Syzygium luehmannii* 'Royal Flame'), which produces crimson, pink and bronze new growth that makes a very Christmassy display. As summer progresses and the tree is returned to the big outdoors, growth gradually fades to green.

Keep it in a large pot for repeat Christmas tree use or plant this extraordinarily tough lillypilly into any garden soil in a lightly shaded spot that recalls its rainforest origin. It can also be grown very successfully as a hedge, as it is easily maintained at about 1.5m high and wide.



festive flowers

Choosing a native plant as a Christmas tree because it flowers throughout the festive season is a nice idea, though it could lead to a few days of gathering up all the spent and scattered flowers. Victoria's Christmas bush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*) could be used as a very temporary indoor plant, as it produces masses of beautiful pink or white mint-like flowers in summer.

More appropriate and longer lasting, though, would be New South Wales Christmas bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*). This handsome small tree achieves its festive colour not from flowers but from the decorative red sepals that remain after the true flowers fall. The sepals come into their own in December, when they reach full colour. The trees reach about 4.5m high and 1.8m wide in the bush, but are smaller in gardens.

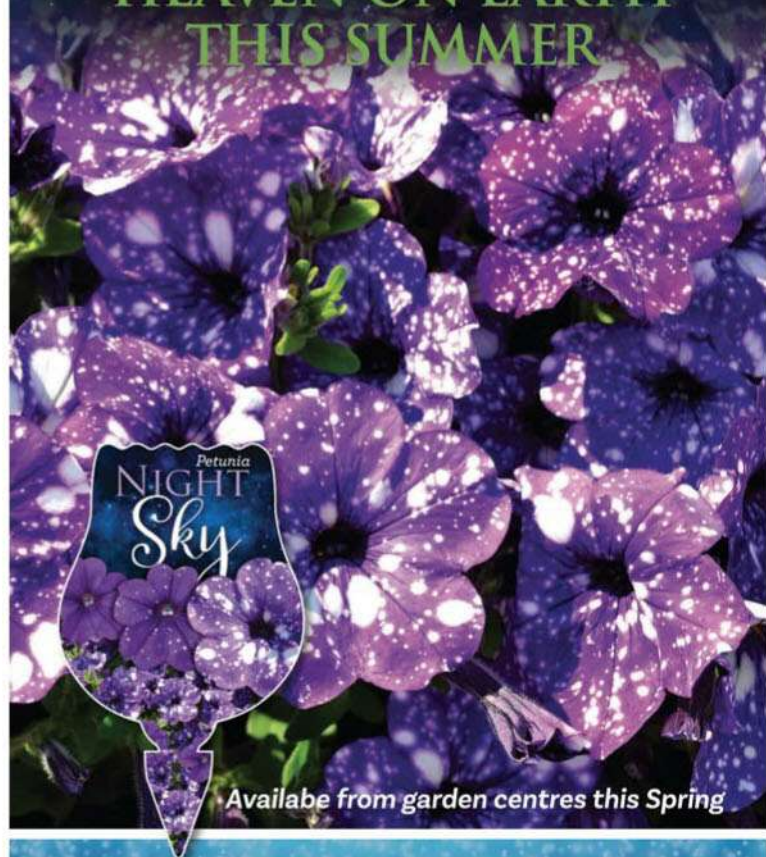
The afterlife of the New South Wales Christmas bush as a garden plant is good too, as it is tolerant and attractive in the home garden in all but overly wet soils. Once established, decorate it in the garden to enjoy outdoors with a Christmas Day barbecue, rather than having a tree indoors. **GA**

PHOTOS: JENNIFER SOO, ALAMY, MOKKIE, WARNERS NURSERIES

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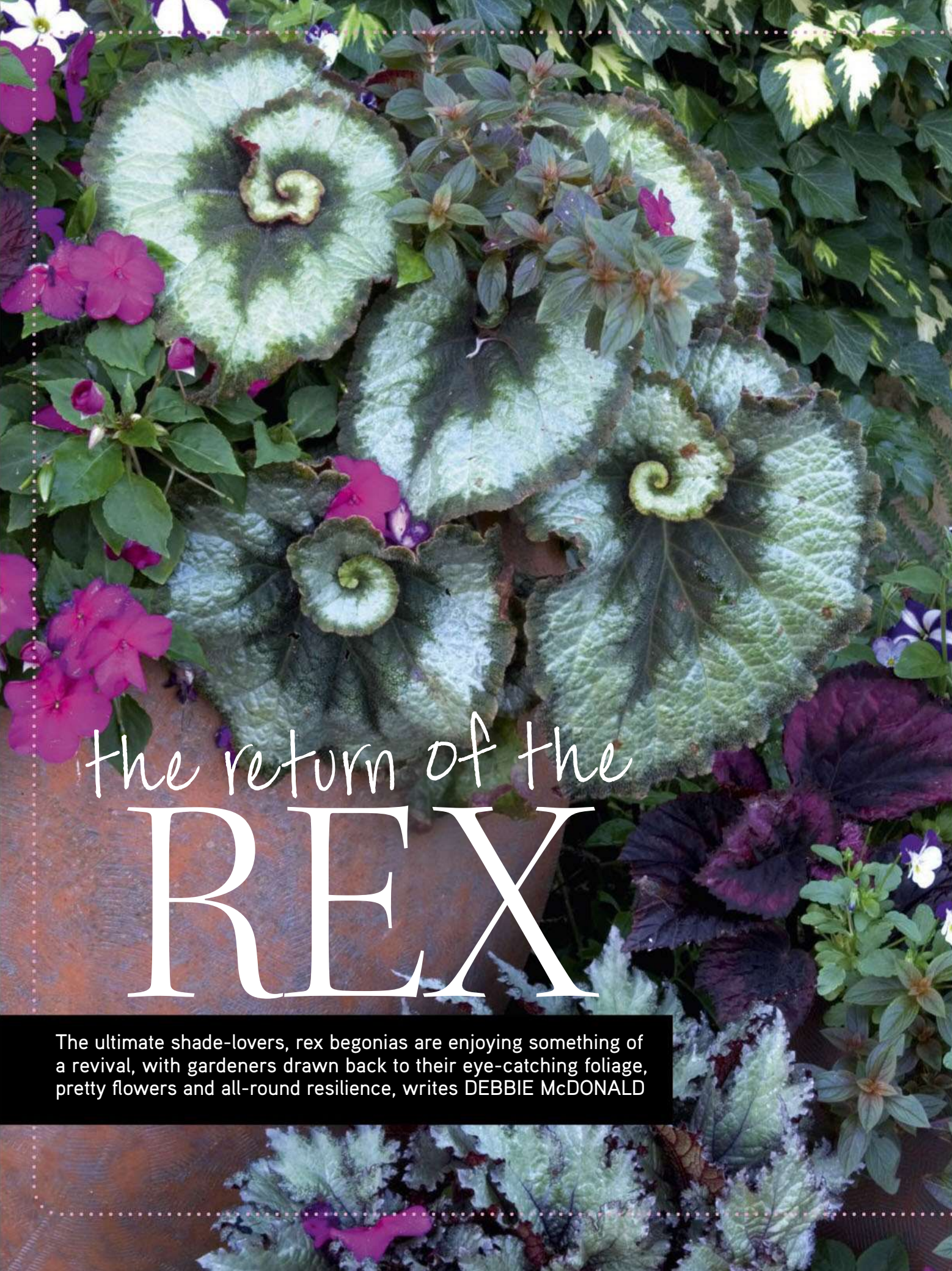
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the return of the REX

The ultimate shade-lovers, rex begonias are enjoying something of a revival, with gardeners drawn back to their eye-catching foliage, pretty flowers and all-round resilience, writes DEBBIE McDONALD

At a glance

common name

rex begonia

botanical name

Begonia Rex-cultorum

plant type

perennial

↑ 30–60cm

↔ 30–60cm

☁ ☁ shade/semi-shade

🕒 year-round

🌸 mid-summer to late autumn



■ suitable

Splashed, spotted, striped and snail. These are just a few of the words used to describe that most glamorous of begonias – the rex begonia. I've always wondered who Rex was, but it turns out the name doesn't refer to a person. Rather, it alludes to rex as being the king of all begonias, and when you see one it's easy to understand why.

Rex begonias have had a well-deserved resurgence in popularity, mainly due to their ability to adapt and acclimatise to most conditions. They have wonderful foliage, with swirls, spots and stripes in colours that include black, silver, green, red and purple, and a range of metallic sheens and interesting shapes – some remind me of giant snails. Plants grow 30–60cm in height, and their leaves can be up to 30cm wide. Flowers appear from mid summer to late autumn and, although quite small, are very attractive.

With some 1600 species of begonia in cultivation at the last count, it can be quite tricky working out which begonia is which. Plants vary in size, from dwarf pot plants to tall shrubs, and come in many foliage and flower colours and combinations.

There are nine basic groupings of begonias, which include rhizomatous, shrub-like and cane-like. The rex begonias commonly grown in Australia belong to the Rex-cultorum group, and have been cultivated from *Begonia rex* and species from South-East Asia, including India, the lower foothills of the Himalayas, Myanmar, China and Indonesia. These begonias are rhizomatous, with a creeping upright or horizontal stem. They form mounding groundcovers, which look glorious in a pot or in the understorey of a garden.

getting started

Begonias love the shade, and the best spot in the garden for a rex is one with filtered light to full shade, although some varieties can take morning sun too. It's often a matter of trial and error – if you find a plant is not thriving in either too much sun or too much shade, then simply move it. Deep shade is not ideal as the stems elongate, flowering is reduced, and the leaves can become limp. Indoors, rex begonias are wonderful as living flower arrangements that last for years. They need really bright light, such as near a window – but keep them out of direct sunlight. The bathroom is an ideal spot due to its high humidity.

The number of rex begonia cultivars is endless, making it hard to choose. Specialist breeder Ross Bolwell has been growing begonias for 36 years, and the rexes are just one portion of the 1200-plus begonia varieties at his nursery in north-west Sydney. He has many named cultivars, including ►

'Annan Jewel', which has purple and green stripes with pink spots, plus silver 'Kathleyana', purple and silver-green 'Artistry', black, hot-pink and silver 'Acclamation', and 'Celebration', which has red and silver leaves with metallic green speckles. Ross recommends gardeners choose a leaf pattern they like, rather than search for particular named cultivars.

Ross rates the adaptability of rex begonias. "They grow incredibly well in warm temperate areas such as Sydney, Perth and Melbourne, but they go berserk in the tropics – it's their favourite place," he says. Gardeners in cold mountain regions can also grow them well, as long as they are kept in a shade or bush house in the winter, for protection. "Even though we get frost in winter, I leave my rexes outside in a sheltered spot," says Ross. "During the very cold months, the leaves drop and the rhizome just sits there. When spring arrives, the leaves come back."

planting & maintenance

In the garden, prepare your soil well. Dig in lots of broken-down compost and mulch to protect roots from heat and cold. If planting in pots, don't choose too big a pot – they seem to grow better if they are pot-bound. Let the plant grow really big, then only go up one pot size. Always use a premium potting mix; Ross finds an African violet mix works best.

If you water begonias every day the roots will rot, so water thoroughly to soak the soil, then leave them until the soil is touch dry. To test this, pick up the pot – it will be heavy when the soil is moist, or light when it needs water. The colour of the soil is also an indicator – if it's darker, then leave it, and when the soil is light brown it's time to water.

Fertilising is easy. Apply slow-release granules three times a year – with new growth in spring, in December, and again in early March. Rexes are sensitive to overfeeding so, if you don't like granules, use other fertilisers at half the recommended rate.

Unfortunately, rex begonias are susceptible to powdery mildew, particularly during the warm days and cool nights of spring and autumn. This doesn't normally kill the plant, but it can weaken it and look unsightly – the leaves become spotted and even drop. To treat this, apply a powdery mildew spray. You may see another group of begonias for sale called non-rex rhizomatous varieties. These are



"If planting in pots, don't choose too big a pot – they seem to grow better if they are pot-bound"

bred mainly from South American species and are more resistant to powdery mildew.

propagation

You can buy begonias at most nurseries, although the range may be limited. For more unusual varieties, try specialist growers and begonia societies. However, if you come across a rex begonia you like, it is easy to propagate from a full-leaf cutting – insert the base of the leaf into a small pot of propagating mix.

They can also be propagated from a 10–15cm-long tip of a healthy rhizome (root), or a leaf wedge. Slice very large leaves into wedges, each with a main vein. Insert the rhizome or leaf wedge, vein pointing down, into propagating mix, and firm it in. Water regularly to keep moist. Roots should form in about six weeks.

The best time to propagate is November, although you can try it from October to April, as long as you water well throughout summer. **GA**



further information

There are several begonia societies around the country, full of enthusiasts with expert knowledge. Here are a few to try:

New South Wales begoniansw.com.au

Queensland queenslandbegonia.wordpress.com

Western Australia begoniaswa.org

Victoria begoniasvictoria.wordpress.com

South Australia begoniasa.org.au



Did you know?

Rex begonias are great low-water plants. You should only water them when the soil is becoming dry.

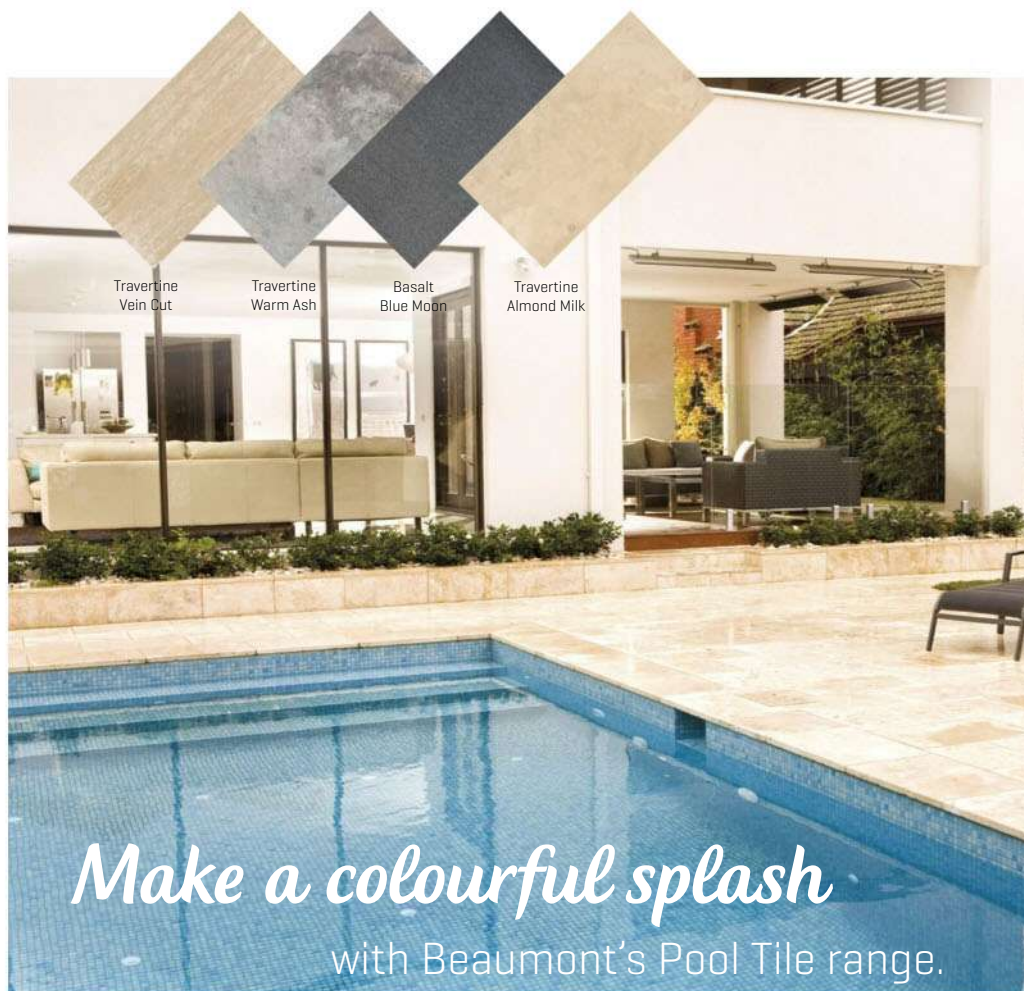


SHADY CHARACTERS

Clockwise from main
Delicate light pink spots soften the bold purple and green stripes on 'Annan Jewel'; rex begonias thrive indoors in pots – a sunny bathroom position is ideal; silvery 'Kathleyana' has strong, green veining; the deep red centres and dark edging on 'Celebration' are eye-catching; 'Artistry'.
Previous page Spiralling snail-like foliage adds a touch of glamour to shady spots in the garden.

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the proof is in the **PRUNING**

words **NOEL BURDETTE** photography **KIM WOODS RABBIDGE**

The heroes of this vibrant Queensland garden are Australian natives, clipped to perfection by two plant-savvy gardeners with a wonderful feel for colour and texture



Toowoomba in south-east Queensland is a city with a serious gardening vibe. Good soil, plenty of rain and cool winters make the growing easy, and each spring, during the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers, hordes of plant-lovers take in the kaleidoscope of colour that blankets the city's parks and gardens. Local gardeners enter the *Chronicle* Garden Competition, and vie for the title of Grand Champion.

One previous winner is Terrara, a garden dedicated to showcasing the beauty, textures and colours of mostly native plants. Developed over the past six years by owners Maria and Gordon Reynolds, it is proof that with a combination of careful management and disciplined pruning, natives can infuse traditional home gardens with surprising and spectacular elegance.

Native gardens are often left to grow 'wild' – with ample space, so trees and shrubs can extend their intertwining branches, and groundcovers rambling among the undergrowth. Maria and Gordon have challenged this thinking entirely in their 660m² garden, showing that native plants can be tamed to thrive within more compact spaces.

"Regular pruning of many native species always keeps them in active, healthy growth, providing beautiful foliage and extended flowering," says Maria. "Many people new to growing native plants have the misconception that you shouldn't prune as regularly as we do. But, as you can see, the proof is in the pruning!" This discipline has taken years to perfect, and Maria and Gordon even manage to keep tall-growing plants maintained at set heights.

mixing traditions

Like any well-groomed garden taking part in the *Chronicle* Garden Competition, Terrara features a precise lawn area, which has been edged with sturdy timber to frame everything into place.

Graduated steps lead you past various species of *Grevillea*, *Leptospermum*, *Acacia* and *Prostanthera*, carefully shaped into thickly foliated specimens – more reminiscent of exotic species, such as gardenia or azaleas. In tight spaces where mowing is difficult, grassed pathways have given way to cleverly used timber sleepers, laid lengthways. As with other traditional gardens, entertainment areas and arbors are fully utilised. The likes of the ►

SHEARED DELIGHT

Clockwise from main
In the right-hand bed, a potted grass tree, edged with a native paper daisy, sits beneath tea-tree 'Lemon Twist', along with grevilleas and a white-flowering commersonia; a pretty exotic, leucadendron; Gordon and Maria Reynolds; *Grevillea synapheae* (left) and grafted *G. 'Poorinda Royal Mantle'* (right) are trained and clipped, leaving enough space for underplantings; *Grevillea 'Sylvia'*.

Previous page *Pandorea pandorana* 'Ruby Bells' (left) and variety 'Golden Showers' (right) clamber up a timber arbor.



"Regular pruning of many native species keeps them in active, healthy growth"



wonga wonga vine (*Pandorea pandorana*) are expertly trimmed and encouraged to smother structures with clusters of bell-shaped flowers. A small pond with a bridge also showcases native aquatic and marginal plants, to attract wildlife.

Fragrances and textures combine and contrast as you travel along the tidy and well-trimmed pathways. There are many cultivars of native mint bushes (*Prostanthera* spp.), the fresh scent of wax flowers (*Philotheca myoporoides* syn. *Eriostemon myoporoides*), and the citrus tang of *Thryptomene baeckeacea*. These mix in with the gentle charm of *Melaleuca trichophylla*, the simple beauty of *Crowea exalata* and the heart-warming sight of many native fuchsias (*Correa* spp.) with their pendulous bell flowers. Dense plantings and mulching mean weeds are naturally discouraged and kept to a minimum.

Maria and Gordon hold a passion for grevilleas, having collected more than 150 different species and varieties, many of which are grafted. Some, such as the groundcover *Grevillea* 'Poorinda Royal Mantle', are grafted onto tall standards of more than 2m. These have been strategically placed throughout the garden to bring height to corners, while still allowing ample growing space and ►

MIXING TEXTURES

From bottom left *Eremophila nivea* has soft silver foliage; the shrubby purple *Hardenbergia violacea* and leptospermum (still showing brown buds) thrive beneath the sheltering branches of *Eremophila nivea* and nearby red-flowered *Grevillea* 'Lady O'.

"Maria and Gordon hold a passion for grevilleas and have collected more than 150 different species"





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BREATH OF FRESH AIR

From far left Orange, red and yellow hues from a mixed planting of grevilleas shelter a quiet seating area that conceals an in-ground water tank; *Pandorea* 'Ruby Bells'; pink everlasting daisy.



protection around their bases. Here, you can find colourful plantings of the native paper daisy (*Xerochrysum bracteatum* syn. *Bracteantha bracteatum*), native brachyscome daisy and the delightful black-eyed Susan (*Tetradlea thymifolia*).

Even the tightest space, such as a metre-deep patch in between the home and neighbouring fence line, shows off a happy combination of native and exotic fern and orchid species. These feel as if they are naturally cooling the entire side of the house. Meanwhile, shady corners explode with colour from surprise plantings of bright orange clivia.

setting the goals

Astonishingly, Gordon and Maria haven't engaged in a lot of long-term planning; instead, their approach to planting is only governed by the needs of each species. "We tend not to overthink things. This can often hinder our options. If a plant prefers a drier spot over others, then it is grouped with other dry-loving species. This is the same for sun or shade requirements. We try not to overcomplicate things or think too deeply, as this can slow down our own enjoyment of the garden," says Maria.

This principle has not hindered any levels of aesthetic appeal. Plants cleverly complement

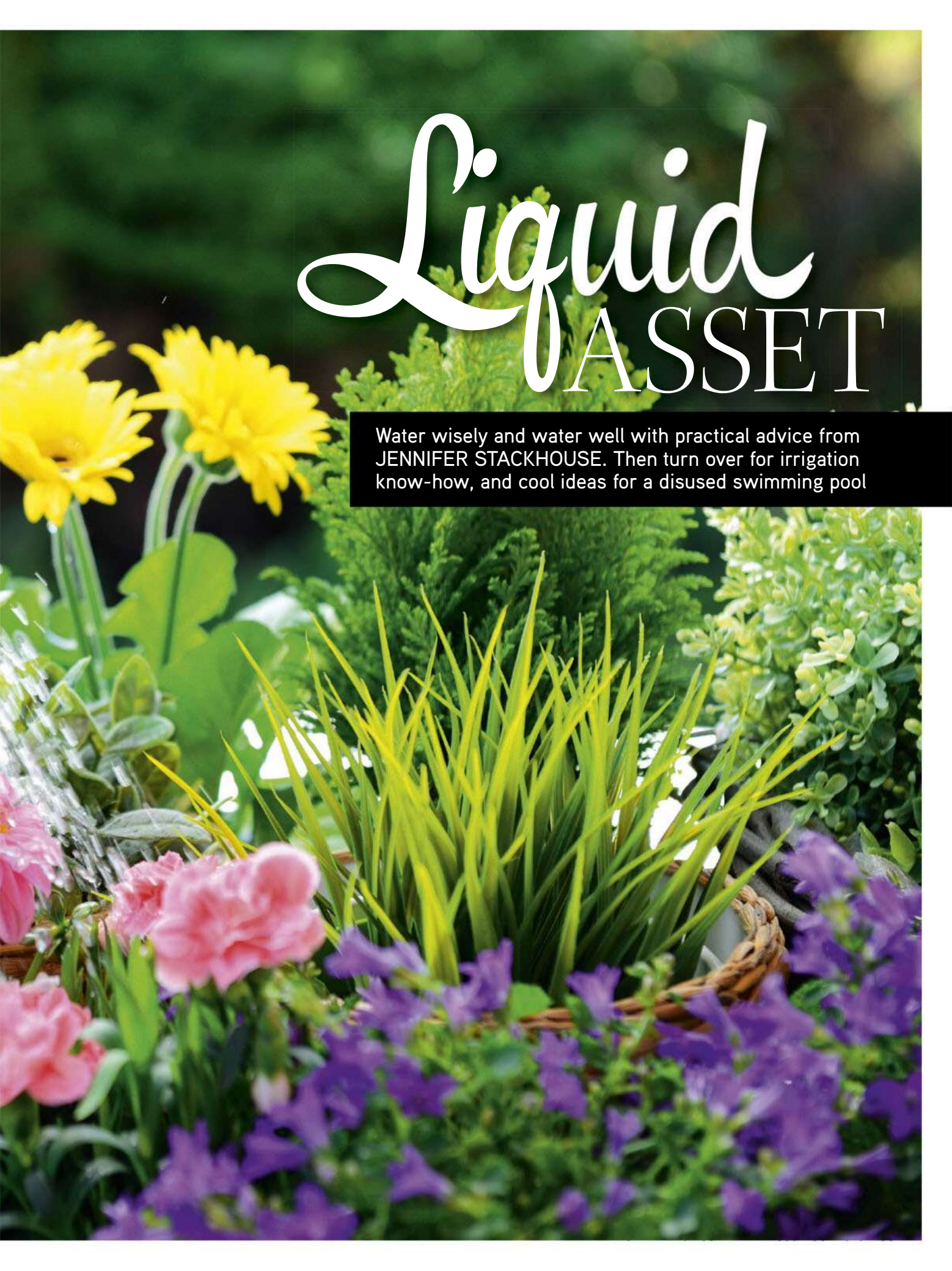
their companions and contrast beautifully with foliage colour, texture and flower structure. For example, the woolly, silver foliage of the emu bush (*Eremophila nivea*), with its violet coloured blooms, shines out like a beacon at various points.

While grevilleas dominate the garden, they haven't been chosen solely for their abundance of colour. Gordon and Maria use them to attract regular visitations from native birds. "While we tend to constantly prune the garden, we deliberately leave a percentage of plants untouched, to make sure we don't remove all the flowers for the birds," says Maria. "Once the pruned plants begin to put on new growth and flower buds, those that were left behind are pruned back into shape so the birds still have plants to feed from."

It's a continual cycle in the garden that Maria and Gordon feel very strongly about and, awards aside, this is the prize they value the most. "We love to witness the activity from the many species that visit our garden, and feel privileged they choose our garden to feed and raise future generations." **GA**

Maria and Gordon's garden is open to visitors during next year's Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers, which takes place September 15–24.





Liquid ASSET

Water wisely and water well with practical advice from JENNIFER STACKHOUSE. Then turn over for irrigation know-how, and cool ideas for a disused swimming pool



After many years of below-average rainfall, with plants hunkered down and trying to survive on whatever moisture they can find, the tables have turned. Rain has fallen across much of Australia. The benefits have been evident in gardens and parks this past spring, with green lawns and lots of flowers on shrubs, trees and spring-flowering perennials. In the bush and desert inland, it was a top year for wildflowers.

As the summer progresses, the rain may stop, especially across southern and inland regions where dry summers are the norm. Even if the rain persists, high temperatures and long summer days dry out gardens, meaning extra watering is needed for plants to not just survive, but also thrive. It's time to get out the hose, dust off the watering can and flush out the irrigation system, to give the garden the water it needs to get through summer.

THIRST AID

From bottom left

Remove weeds to stop them stealing water from plants; every garden needs a rainwater tank.

Top tip

Weeds are more than an eyesore. They also compete with garden plants for resources including water.

importance of watering

Watering sounds like a simple task, but many gardeners fail miserably. Sins include: not watering a plant when it's thirsty; splashing water around, rather than concentrating it at the root system; and delaying the process in case it rains.

Good watering does more than encourage flowering – plants are more productive and resilient. Repeated drying out and water stress weakens plants, making them more susceptible to pests and diseases. Plants in small pots are highly vulnerable to drying out and can be hard to re-wet. They may fail to establish when moved into the garden, or even die.

Get plants off to a good start by watering well at planting, preferably with

a dose of liquid seaweed added to the bucket or watering can. Then water the newbies every day until they are well established. Provide this care even if the label says the plant is drought tolerant. In the small print, a line really ought to be inserted to say: 'once established'.

how to water

To water all plants effectively, make sure water is delivered around the roots, and that it soaks in. Don't just water and move on. Pause, feel the soil, and probe beneath the surface with a finger. The moisture should extend down 10–15cm, depending on how far down the roots are. If the soil is still dry, water again, but this time use a watering can with a soil-wetting agent dissolved in the contents, to counteract water repellence in the soil.

Once a plant starts to show signs its roots are growing out into the soil or the new potting mix, watering can be reduced. When root growth occurs, the plant is beginning to get established in its new surroundings, tapping into moisture in the soil.

Drought tolerant and well-established plants can survive on rainwater alone or with infrequent watering. However, if the weather is dry, windy or hot, or the plant is in a container or in very sandy soil, any new planting will need extra water.

what if it rains?

Many people put off watering because it looks as if it might rain. No amount of watering – whether it's from the hose, watering can, sprinkler or an irrigation system – revives a thirsty garden as thoroughly as a deluge of heavy rain. It soaks into the soil, washes leaves clean of dust and often drops the temperature, all of which benefit plants.



PHOTOS ISTOCK, PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATSKY



RIGHT AS RAIN

From left Rainwater is beneficial to plants, whether directly from rain or used for watering and irrigation; plants that are severely wilted like this one need to be soaked in a bucket to rehydrate the root ball.



water checklist for summer

- Pots, edibles and new plantings need watering every day
- Flowering plants that are established require watering once or twice a week
- Established drought-hardy plants may survive without extra water, unless it is very hot and dry
- Lawns benefit from a deep watering once or twice a week. Left unwatered, running lawns (such as couch, buffalo and kikuyu) die back until rain returns. Cool-season grasses may die off during summer without frequent watering
- Top up water features regularly, as water evaporates on hot or windy days

When the garden is dry, however, the plants may die if the rain doesn't fall, or isn't heavy enough to thoroughly water. A shower, or even a couple of millimetres of rain, won't do much to rehydrate the garden. Small amounts of rain won't even penetrate the mulch, although it will top up rainwater tanks.

Even if good rain is forecast, inspect plants that usually need daily watering, and water them if they seem dry or look stressed (for example, are wilted), or if the soil still feels dry after any rain. Many plants in containers can miss out on rainfall and still need to be hand watered after heavy rain.

is all water the same?

Although all water is chemically H₂O, its quality can vary, depending on the source. Water from the mains supply (also known as town water or scheme water) is the water most widely used in gardens. In many areas it is neutral but, in places with alkaline conditions, town water may also be alkaline – in which case, use rainwater on any acid-loving plants, such as camellias.

Rainwater is ideal for gardens. Collected in home water tanks, it's a valuable asset as it allows for watering in times of water restrictions. Rain that falls during a thunderstorm may also contain nitrogen in a form that can be absorbed by plants (nitrogen is an important plant nutrient). On the down side, heavy rainfall can also leach nutrients from the soil.

In dry areas without town water and not enough water to fill tanks, gardeners may rely on bore water for irrigation. This varies in its make-up, but can be high in iron (and leave brown staining on surfaces and plants) and salts. If bore water is 'salty' it may damage or kill sensitive plants.

Recycled water (from the shower, or rinse cycle of the washing machine) is a good resource during dry times. It is suited for use on all but edible leafy plants. Use with caution as it contains impurities (such as soap residue and fats) and bacteria, and shouldn't be stored for more than 24 hours. **GA**

Try this

A 2–5cm layer of coarse mulch keeps soils cool and reduces water loss, while allowing rain and irrigation to soak in.



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drip advisor

An automated irrigation system helps plants thrive in the summer heat. JOSH BYRNE advises on types of systems, basic maintenance and exciting technological advances



Now that summer has arrived, watering your plants is a priority. For summer-dry climates such as Perth, good watering practices mean the difference between a thriving garden and one that struggles through the heat. A reliable irrigation system will keep your garden hydrated and, if properly managed, save you time and prevent overwatering.

The aim of a good irrigation system is to reliably deliver water to targeted areas, with minimum wastage. The sophistication of a system often varies, depending on your garden size. For example, a simple tap connection that delivers water via poly pipe and drippers to pots may be adequate for a small courtyard. Larger gardens, however, are better suited to a system with a



programmable controller connected to a series of solenoid valves, which supply water to various 'zones' in the garden.

Whatever the scale of your system, some basic maintenance will provide plants with the water they need and help you to use water efficiently.

1 clean the filter

It is important to include a filter at the beginning of the system, whether you are using either individual drippers or dripline, to prevent the drippers from blocking. Disc filters, such as the one shown here, are my preferred option because they provide a large filtration surface area, so the water flow rate is less likely to be reduced, whereas the more common screen-type filters can quickly become clogged.

Both types of filters can be easily cleaned by rinsing them under a tap.

The frequency of cleaning depends on the type of filter and water quality. I only have to clean mine once a season.

2 give it a flush

Even with a filter in place, small amounts of sediment and minerals can collect in the pipework of your watering system. Flushing the lines removes this material, preventing it from clogging the drippers. Like filter cleaning, frequency of flushing depends on water quality; I flush mine once a season. If you have sprinklers, check that the nozzles are clear and the spray pattern is directed accurately over the target area.

3 control the water

Program your controller to run the times and frequency of irrigation to match the season. During cool or rainy periods, your system can usually be



switched off. As the temperature and evaporation rate increases, the frequency of irrigation should also be increased.

Different drip emitter and sprinkler types vary in how much water they provide, so bear this in mind when determining the duration of irrigation.

The required zone run times and frequency are also influenced by the soil type of your garden. For example, sandy soil is generally poor at holding water, so it's best to give your plants shorter, regular watering events to prevent water and nutrients leaching past the root zone, and the soil drying out between irrigation cycles.

If you're not sure of the application rate of your emitters, it's a good idea to show a photo of the nozzles to an irrigation retailer, who will be able to advise you on suitable run times. **GA**



hi-tech watering

Advances in commercial-scale irrigation technology are making their way into the residential market, providing gardeners with tools that make irrigation systems more convenient, reliable and efficient. Here are some of the technologies available.



WATER METER

Installing a water meter on your irrigation system allows you to track how much water you are using. It can also be used to detect leaks and blockages.



REMOTE CONTROL

Some irrigation controllers can be accessed online, so the programming can be adjusted via smart phones or tablets. Some controllers also have water-meter data inputs, allowing you to monitor how much water is being used, and receive alerts if there is a problem.



MOISTURE MONITORS

Devices that detect rain or the level of moisture in the soil are very useful. Rain sensors, also known as rain shut-off switches, and soil-moisture sensors can be used to prevent unnecessary watering by switching off the irrigation system when it rains, or when a preset soil moisture level has been reached.

from
POOL
to wildlife haven

words **ANGUS STEWART** photography **JAC TAYLOR**

An unloved swimming pool is easy to turn into an aquatic wonderland. After filming at a converted pond earlier this year, **ANGUS STEWART** expands on what's involved



PONDER LIFE

Clockwise from left Angus Stewart talks to Michael Gillings, who converted his pool in South Turramurra two years ago; a sculpture topped with Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*); covering the pool edges with layers of stones and tree branches helps the pond blend into its surroundings.



"There have been no problems with smells... and mosquitoes have not been an issue"



Attracting wildlife into the backyard is an idea that appeals to the majority of Australian gardeners. Given the amount of natural bushland that surrounds many towns and cities, it's possible to bring our fabulous fauna into urban areas, allowing beautiful birds, frolicking frogs and lounging lizards to be observed up-close.

One of the keys to encouraging wildlife is to provide visitors with a permanent and easily accessible source of water. A pond is an excellent way to achieve this and, once established, offers the extra benefits of an ecosystem with food and shelter.

For some homeowners, swimming pools are under used, and maintaining them is a drain on time and money. Earlier this year, I visited a man in northern Sydney who, with the help of his local council, turned his disused pool into a pond. Michael Gillings took part in Ku-ring-gai Council's 'Pool to Pond' program, which has been providing residents with practical advice and information since 2007. The program has made a number of interesting findings, which include:

- There have been no reported problems with smells. Algal growth is a natural consequence of the process, but the fish and other inhabitants of the ponds keep it in balance by using it as a food source.
- Mosquitoes have not been an issue in the council's experience. Problem species don't tend to breed in the deeper water of a converted swimming pool.
- Once established, the pond is low-maintenance, saving owners money in electricity and chemical costs.
- The new pond still needs to meet the same safety regulations as it did as a swimming pool (filled to a depth of 30cm or more). There's some helpful legal advice on Ku-ring-gai Council's 'Wild Things' website.

making the change

The basic concept is to turn off your pool's pump and filter, then stop adding chlorine. This essentially converts the swimming pool into an uncovered rainwater storage facility (which means the water can also be used to irrigate your garden in dry times). If your pool contains salt water, you will need to contact your water board to arrange draining three-quarters of the pool water.

The next step is to construct structures in and around the pool, to help aquatic plants become established. These will provide a habitat for any fauna that discovers the area and encourage species to colonise. Aquatic plants can sit on platforms made from natural rock or bricks, and it's possible to create floating platforms using foam covered in shade cloth. Try to vary the height of any platforms so you can introduce aquatic species that thrive submerged to different depths. ►



An initial consequence of the conversion process is that a green algae will colonise the system. Over time, this stops dominating the pond, as other species of algae establish themselves that don't colour the water.

choosing species

Aquatic plants can act like a filter in ponds, taking up nutrients from the breakdown of organic matter that enters the system. Many large nurseries stock aquatic plants, but it's best to find a specialist aquatic nursery (sometimes called a 'water garden' nursery) who can help you source species local to your area – as some exotic and native aquatic plants can become invasive, and others are noxious. Your local council's conservation or environment department may be able to help you find species for your region and highlight ones to avoid.

For the northern Sydney area, Ku-ring-gai Council recommends a range of plants to its residents. To float on the surface, it suggests water fern (*Azolla pinnata*), which has weed potential but makes good compost, and yellow bladderwort (*Utricularia gibba*) – which is carnivorous and traps small aquatic creatures to digest. The council also recommends common spike-rush (*Eleocharis acuta*), grey rush (*Lepironia articulata*) and ribbon grass (*Vallisneria spiralis*) for a depth of up to 20cm, while the classic swamp lily (*Ottelia ovalifolia*) can have its roots submerged by 20–40cm.

Several aquatic plant nurseries also stock native fish that can be introduced as an additional natural filter – as well creating a natural food chain, bringing other wildlife to the garden. Fish can generally be introduced a few months after the conversion process has been

INTO THE WILD

Clockwise from top left Planting a range of species with diverse leaf shapes adds interest and shelter for wildlife; mosses and bryophytes create microhabitats to soften the pond border; small succulents do well on the paved surrounds; always quarantine new plants for a week or so to avoid introducing gambusia, an invasive freshwater fish (also known as mosquitofish); taro (*Colocasia* sp.); thalia makes a dramatic statement, but can be invasive in some areas.





"Create layers in the landscape with groundcovers and clumping plants, shrubs and some trees"



started, and once the aquatic plants have become established. Think about the size and depth of your pool and the size of any fish species – Australian bass, for example, grow up to 60cm in length.

Also consider what the fish eat and whether they breed in ponds. Crimson-spotted rainbow fish eat mosquito larvae and breed prolifically – but (like many fish) they'll also tuck into tadpoles. Tadpole-friendly suggestions given to frog-loving Ku-ring-gai residents include firetail gudgeon and Pacific blue eyes, both of which are indigenous to Sydney. Fish species need to be suitable for your area, and some should be avoided, so seek advice from a local specialist.

hidden habitats

To enhance the benefits of your new pond, you can add other wildlife-friendly touches to your garden. Create layers in the landscape with groundcovers and clumping plants, shrubs and some trees (which grow to a height that suits the size of your garden). These provide safety, cover and additional habitat, helping to coax a variety of birds and animals into your garden.

To blend the new pond into the garden, try covering the pool edges with natural materials, such as rocks, stones and suitably sized tree trunks or branches. In time they'll become covered in moisture-loving plants, such as moss and ferns, making it hard to imagine the original swimming pool was ever there.

Ku-ring-gai's 'Pool to Pond' program has created new wildlife corridors within the northern Sydney suburbs for a variety of native animals; in particular, birds living in the local bushland reserves as well as some migratory species. Water dragons have also been very successful in colonising the ponds.

The scheme proves that gardeners can work with nature to create a sustainable, low maintenance water feature. Down the track, if you or a future owner decide to reinstate the pool, you just need to renew the pump and reverse the conversion process. **GA**

To view the TV segment, visit abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s4439781.htm

more information

- Ku-ring-gai Council: kmc.nsw.gov.au
(search for 'Pool to Pond' from the home page)
- wildthings.org.au
- ozwatergardens.com.au





make a Splash

What else can you do when a pool has outlived its usefulness? ARNO KING shares his top ideas

Australians are very creative, and over the years I have seen great reuses for unwanted swimming pools. Removing the concrete pool shell, pumps, filter and other infrastructure incurs significant cost and effort, and overlooks the potential of these spaces.

As Angus has highlighted (*page 46*), a pond is one excellent option, but there are plenty of other possibilities to realise, either by extending the pond concept or draining the water and repurposing the void. Here are a few of my top ideas, some of which need planning approval and a landscape contractor – but the cost of professional help can be weighed up against the expense involved in removing the pool and filling in the space.

garden bed

The easiest option for a retired swimming pool is to turn it into a large garden bed. To do this, remove the plug from the base of the pool, add a drainage layer consisting of rocks to approximately 1m from the proposed soil surface, topped with a 150mm layer of gravel and finally a layer of coarse washed sand, allowing for 700mm of topsoil. To remove all hint of the swimming pool, remove the fencing and paving, then mound the area slightly.

wicking bed

This growing system is very popular with vegetable growers. Wicking beds rely on a water reservoir, which sits below a vegetable garden. Moisture is wicked up into the soil. These gardens are great



for people who are often away so can't water daily. The large volume of water stored in the pool also keeps the soil cool over summer. To undertake this, the base of the pool shell is filled with rocks to about 1m from the top. These are covered with a sheet of geofabric, then a 100mm layer of coarse washed sand and, finally, a layer of growing medium. A couple of pipes need to be vertically placed so you can top up the water. To avoid the substrate flooding, large holes are drilled into the pool walls 50mm above the depth of the geofabric. Wicks of moisture-retentive material are inserted between the soil and rock to wick up the stored water. ►

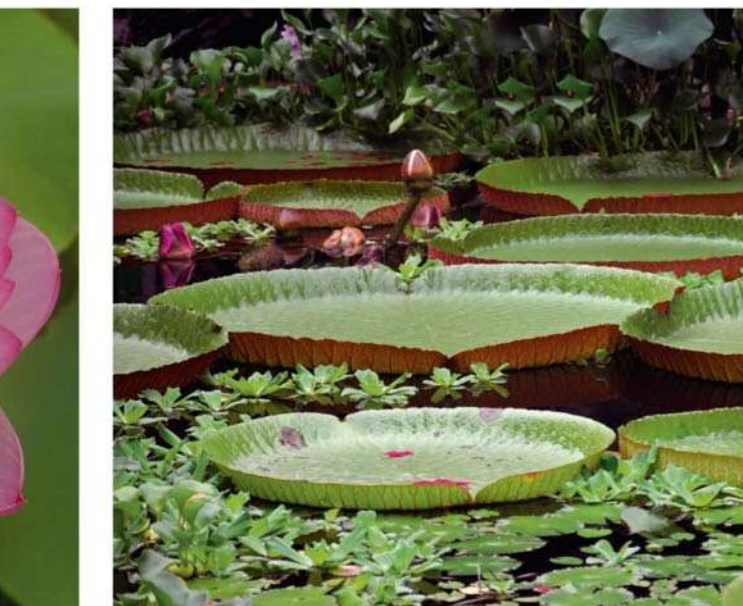


"The easiest option for a retired swimming pool is to turn it into a large garden bed"



STILL WATERS

Clockwise from left
A heron statue takes
pride of place in a bog
garden; the huge
upturned leaves of
the Victoria waterlily
(*Victoria amazonica*);
the sacred lotus
(*Nelumbo nucifera*).



Clever watering

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bog garden

You can use the wicking bed concept for a bog garden – although the holes drilled into the walls need to be 200mm higher than the geofabric to increase moisture levels. Insectivorous plants such as pitcher plants (*Sarracenia* spp.) and sundews (*Drosera* spp.) do well in full sun or semi-shade with sphagnum moss as a substrate. There are also many aquatic aroids (related to philodendrons and anthuriums) that thrive in swampy conditions. Many of these are well-known in the tropics and subtropics and include *Montrichardia arborescens*, *Typhonodorum lindleyanum*, *Cyrtosperma* spp., *Lasia spinosa* and *Orotium aquaticum*.

botanical showpiece

In the warm temperate, subtropical and tropical regions, it's possible to turn the swimming pool into a giant pond to showcase spectacular plants. The Victoria waterlily (*Victoria amazonica*) from the Amazon and its Paraná River cousin (*V. cruziana*) from Central South America both have colossal upturned leaves (up to 2m across) and strongly perfumed flowers, which change from white to pink. Generally treated as annuals, these are grown over the warmer months from seed. *V. amazonica* is the more tropical of the two but it overwinters in milder winters in Brisbane and further north.

Native to Queensland, the giant blue waterlily, the largest true waterlily in the world and aptly named *Nymphaea gigantea*, has leaves up to 75cm in diameter, and large blooms of amethyst blue up to 25cm in diameter and 20cm above the water.

One of my favourite water plants is the gorgon plant (*Euryale ferox*). The large leaves lie flat on the water surface, and its navy blue, star-shaped flowers are tiny in relation to the leaves.

Finally, we mustn't forget the most popular flower in the world, the sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*). It prefers growing in a large pot raised up on blocks in shallow water, so it's at a depth of 30–50cm.

aquaponic garden

A popular trend, aquaponics combines raising fish with growing hydroponic vegetables. The pool is transformed into a fishpond, but can have a deck on top. The water contains nutritious fish waste, which feeds vegetables by being constantly filtered through a hydroponic growing system. Growers report very few issues with pests and diseases, or fish fatalities. Hydroponic systems are easy to construct and, once established, low maintenance and highly productive. Look out for courses on both hydroponics and aquaponics to find out more.



WARNING

Before repurposing an in-ground swimming pool, check with your council about safety and permit requirements, and whether restrictions apply to certain structures. If consultants or contractors are needed, ensure they have appropriate certifications and qualifications.

SHOWSTOPPERS

Clockwise from above Pitcher plants in a bog garden; the giant blue waterlily (*Nymphaea gigantea*) makes a lovely feature; *Typhonodorum lindleyanum* adds an dramatic element.



water reservoir

There are few places in Australia where water is not an issue for gardeners for at least part of the year. The pool can be transformed into a water reservoir to provide water in times of bushfire or when extra is needed for the garden. Redirect water from the house gutters to keep the reservoir filled. The pool could be either treated as a pond or decked over. Additional fittings can be connected to the pool pump so a hose can be attached.

floating vegetable garden

Around the world, vegetables are grown in lakes or ponds on floating rafts. There are good examples of traditional floating gardens in Bolivia, Mexico, Argentina, Vietnam and Thailand. To create these gardens, soil is placed on woven floating platforms. Capillary action draws water into the soil, keeping it cool and moist. What a wonderful idea for growing vegetables at home! The great thing about floating gardens is that you can farm fish below. In central and northern latitudes of Australia, barramundi are often kept for consumption, but there are many other edible fish and also yabbies to consider.





animal enclosure

Years ago I had a friend who bred turtles, which are surprisingly good climbers and escape artists. He kept them in a reconditioned swimming pool that was unplugged and filled to about 1m below the surrounding soil level. The enclosure had a pond for swimming, a sand beach for egg-laying, and plantings for shade and shelter. Licences are often needed to keep turtles, so check local laws before building an enclosure.

deck & storage

Another effective strategy is to drain the pool, remove the plug then build a deck (with waterproofing beneath) over the pool to create an entertaining area. Before starting, ask your council about structural requirements and planning approvals. Add a hinged hatch and fixed ladder to access the area below – the relatively stable temperatures make it a great spot for a wine cellar. **GA**

Have you done something different with a retired pool? Share it with us by email, Facebook or Instagram. Details on page 3.

Watering with Zoom

NEW

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SCENTS

Fragrant eau-de-cologne mint is fast-growing and delicious
in summer drinks and fruit salads, writes JACKIE FRENCH





At home with Jackie



Does anyone use eau de Cologne these days, much loved by Victorian spinsters who dabbed it onto handkerchiefs? (That's ladies from the Victorian era, not the state.) I sniffed some once: slightly citrusy, slightly lavender... thankfully, nothing like the scent of eau-de-cologne mint.

You wouldn't want to use eau-de-cologne mint in a perfume, not unless you want to smell like a fruit salad. But in drinks and, yes, fruit salad, it is a true delight; freshly minty, deeply fragrant and entirely delicious.

It is also incredibly easy to grow. Buy and plant a tiny pot of it, and it should double in size within a month of warm growing – or even quadruple. If a friend has some in their garden, snip off a 30cm stem, with or without roots, and plant two-thirds of it. Keep it moist and in dappled shade until it is growing well. Cosset it for another month or two, until it has more roots growing out of (what used to be) its stem.

Like most plants, eau-de-cologne mint grows best in full sun, and fertile, deep moist soil. When it is too happy, it spreads... and spreads... and, no matter how much fruit punch you make, you will not eat it all. If this may be a problem, or you are near a waterway, grow it in a pot – but fill it with a good potting mix and remember to keep it moist.

I've found that eau-de-cologne mint can survive (just) in a pot filled with potting mix that should have been changed five years ago, and has now set like semi-concrete. But it will not take being left unwatered under the eaves for three months (because you have forgotten you put the pot there). I discovered this sad fact last autumn, but am still hoping that, as summer springs, my mint will spring up too.

Pots are also good in humid or tropical areas, where eau-de-cologne mint may get rust or other rots. Keep it on the patio, in dappled shade in arid or very hot areas, where it's away from any moisture evaporating from the garden. If it does get rust or brown spots, cut it right back, remove all affected foliage, mulch well to cover spores in the soil, and watch it regrow.

eau-de-cologne mint julip makes one tall glass

- 1 tablespoon eau-de-cologne mint leaves (discard stem)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- soda water
- ice
- 1 tablespoon rye whisky (or 1 tablespoon lemon juice and a dash of bitters)

1 Stir the mint and sugar until the mint is bruised; add a tiny splash of soda water and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Fill the glass with ice, then pour in the whisky or juice and bitters.

2 Top with soda water. Sip slowly as the ice melts, then top it up with more soda water, if needed.



"Buy a tiny pot of it, and it should double in size within a month of warm growing"

Regular pruning – and using – keeps it healthiest. This gives you plenty of fresh leaves to chop into fruit salads (you may find the stems a bit tough), to set into ice blocks before you freeze them, or to give a tang to homemade tabouli. It is equally glorious with chopped pineapple or in a cucumber salad, and added to home-squeezed fruit or vegetable juices.

Pruning your eau-de-cologne mint also means your hands will smell delicious, not of eau de Cologne, but something summery to drink or nibble. **GA**

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the Harvest cucumber

did you know?

Roman Emperor Tiberius is said to have ordered cucumbers to his table every day of the year.

Botanical name: *Cucumis sativus*

A clambering or climbing annual vine with large leaves, twirling tendrils, yellow flowers and cylindrical fruit.

Varieties

Crystal Apple, Lebanese, Parisian Pickling, Lemon, Long White, Green Gem, African Horned, Continental, Long Green

Planting & care

Cucumbers are warm-season growers which, because of their ability to climb, don't require a great deal of space. All they need is a sunny, protected position, a well-drained soil enriched with compost and, should you choose, a simple trellis to keep vines off the ground. The large seeds can be sown directly into soil or raised initially in small pots before planting out – this is a good way to start them when conditions are too wet or still a little cool early season.

Be careful not to overwater the seeds as they are prone to rot. Gradually increase watering after the seeds germinate, and cover soil with mulch to help keep surrounding soil moist and free from weeds. Feed the plants with a liquid fertiliser every two weeks.

Harvesting

The vines grow fast and are highly productive. If production is poor, try pollinating with a soft artist's paintbrush, transferring pollen from the male to female flowers (the females have a small fruit at the base). Keep checking the plants every two days or so, and harvest fruit when they have reached the recommended size and shape for your chosen variety. Snip fruit from the vine carefully to avoid damage. Cucumbers can be stored for up to a week in the fridge, and gluts can be preserved in jars.

Turn to page 62 for cucumber recipes.



not such a HARD NUT to crack

It's time to bring peanuts back to the vegie patch! They're easy to grow, space-efficient and suitable for all areas, writes KARYN COUPER-SMITH

Like many of you, my insatiable curiosity has me constantly seeking new edibles to grow. I'm currently teaching part-time in a primary school, and when one of my Year 4 students, Craig, mentioned he was growing peanuts, my ears shot up like radish seeds!

"Peanuts? As in peanut butter kind of peanuts?" I asked. Craig assured me the peanuts were the real deal and offered to provide me with some plants. He challenged me to see who could grow the biggest peanut. Challenge accepted!

The next day he delivered four healthy peanut specimens and reminded me to keep the biggest pod, to be weighed in after harvesting in three months' time. I planted them and named them accordingly 'Peanut Butter', 'Peanut Fudge', 'Peanut Brittle' and 'Peanut Brownie'.

I spoke with my plants while watering them before school each morning, and checked them each afternoon. I nursed those babies and they shot off so fast I just knew I was going to win this challenge. At about 10 weeks the fruit had set, and I carefully stole a few pods to see how big they were. I was quietly confident I had it in the bag... until disaster struck. I discovered that bandicoots love peanuts – they ate the lot!

getting started

The discovery of 7600-year-old fossilised peanut shells in Peru shows peanuts have been around for a long time, but I doubt you could find many people growing them in gardens today. These 'nuts' are actually legumes and grow underground, unlike real nuts, which grow on trees.

The bush grows 30–50cm high and about 1m across, making it great for small spaces, and you can grow peanuts almost anywhere in Australia.

You need three months of temperatures above 18°C. Spring to early summer is the ideal planting time in subtropical and temperate areas. In the tropics, the dry season is best.

Peanut seeds are easy to find – just buy whole, raw, unprocessed (not roasted or salted) peanuts from the health food shop. Varieties aren't labelled, but they'll grow, as long as they are fairly fresh. You'll need about 15g of kernels for a 5m row.

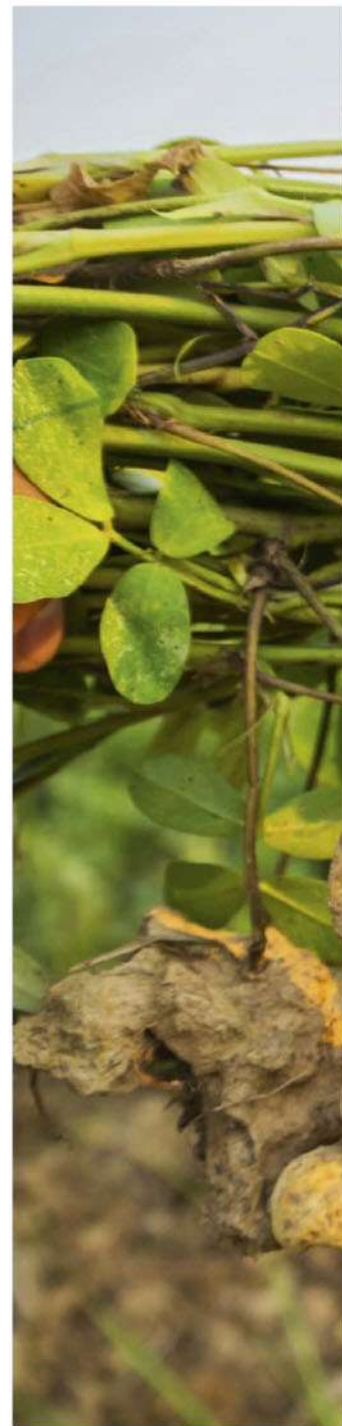
Next, you need to prepare your bed, or pot – yes, peanuts can be grown in large pots! They prefer full sun and well-drained, loose soil. If you have bandicoots sneaking into your garden, I suggest a raised bed. Aim for a pH of 5.5–6.5, and add a low-nitrogen organic fertiliser. Add gypsum to the soil to supply calcium – peanuts need it for the 'nuts' to form well in the pods. Sow the kernels (seeds) about 3cm deep in rows 30cm apart. Growing them this close helps to prevent weeds.

Peanuts grow rapidly, but germination takes a couple of weeks, so an excellent idea is to grow

"Peanuts are actually legumes, and grow underground, unlike nuts, which grow on trees"

fast-growing seedlings, such as lettuce or tatsoi, between the rows of seeds to keep the soil covered while the peanuts become established. Sunflowers, corn or rosella can also be grown with peanuts to make the most of space in your garden.

In about six weeks, yellow flowers start to develop. Watch them closely, as they do the most





At a glance

common name
peanut, groundnut

botanical name
Arachis hypogaea

plant type annual herbaceous plant



■ suitable

☀ full sun

↑ 30–50cm

↔ 50–90cm

🌱 dry season in tropics; spring
to early summer elsewhere

🌱 spring to summer

GOING NUTS

Clockwise, from top left The peanut kernels are well protected by their shells; one plant produces a mass of peanuts, which are ready to eat as soon as they're lifted from the ground; young shoots emerging on a peanut plant.

amazing thing. Once pollinated, these flowers project spikes into the ground, and this is where the magic begins. The peanuts grow on the ends of these spikes, under the ground. Hill up the soil around the roots to enhance production. If rats or mice are stealing peanuts from the ground, try putting fine gauge wire mesh around the beds.

care & maintenance

Watering is crucial as peanuts are developing. Keep the plants moist until they start to turn yellow, then stop watering. At this time, scratch around and dig a few up – if the nuts have filled the shells, they're ready to harvest. Loosen the soil with a garden fork, pull the stalks and shake off the soil.

You can eat the peanuts fresh or dry them for later. Mould is a problem, so dry immediately. In high-humidity areas, dry in a dehydrator at 40°C until crisp. In low-humidity areas, put your peanuts in a dry, semi-shaded spot for three weeks. Lock them up at night to protect them from mice or rats.

Prefer your peanuts roasted? Pop on a baking tray and bake at 180°C, tossing every five minutes until done to your liking. Peanuts have a high oil content and burn easily, so don't overcook. **GA**

A photograph of a raised garden bed. In the foreground, a wooden planter box is filled with lush green strawberry plants. Behind it, a green bucket with orange and yellow stripes holds a shovel and a trowel. In the background, there are more wooden planters with purple flowers and a gravel path.

You RAISE me up!

Take your vegie patch to new heights with a raised garden bed or planter. MARCELLE NANKERVIS runs through the materials and benefits, from ready-made kits to DIY options

When I was a child, our vegie patch consisted of rows of tilled earth, mounded up, lined with a narrow dirt path. It was functional, but not beautiful. When I finally got the chance to have my own vegie garden, I wanted it to be both beautiful and functional. Raised beds were the answer.

These days, garden centres and online suppliers sell a range of ready-to-assemble kits, allowing everyone to enjoy raised beds, no matter how 'construction challenged' you are. They offer excellent drainage, good portability (perfect for renters), and reduce the need to bend down (for anyone with mobility issues). It's possible for some to be converted into a mini-shadehouse or function as a traditional potted garden. This kind of flexibility is helpful when space is tight. If time is scarce, raised garden beds with self-watering features are a must.

When deciding on a bed's height and width, make sure that the central area is easily accessible. Most kits are only 1–1.2m across, to allow easy access to the entire bed. Next, you need to decide on your materials – and there is plenty of choice.

what about wood?

Whether you build it yourself or buy a kit, timber planters are a lovely addition to any garden. There are a few key points to consider. The timber you choose should be able to withstand moisture, resist insect and fungal attack and be safe for use near edible crops. Pine treated with CCA (Copper Chrome Arsenate) may leach trace amounts of arsenic into soil, and is best avoided, especially around children and edible crops. Arsenic-free treated pine is a budget option, but you will get better longevity from untreated hardwood or more durable timbers, such as jarrah and cypress.

Benefits of raised wooden planters

- Often possible to add extra planks to increase the depth, when needed
- Can be combined with seating and storage to maximise space

- Long bed lengths available, and timbers are easily modified
- Can be made on a low budget by recycling timber or old apple crates
- Usually situated on top of the soil, which allows for earthworm activity
- Easy to build or erect with simple tools
- Price range (per bed): \$45–1000+

maybe use metal

Corrugated metal raised planters can be shaped to look like old water tanks, or are available as self-assembly kits (usually rectangular or square). It's also possible to make your own, using a rubber seal along the top to protect little fingers from nips and cuts. Frames are lightweight and durable, and often come in a range of colours. Fully assembled beds are strong (although always inspect the metal's thickness and look for options with bracing and good quality fittings). Beds can also be made to order through water tank suppliers. The fully assembled 'tank' beds are lovely and bring a touch of rural Australia to any garden.

Benefits of raised metal planters

- Often deep enough to accommodate in-ground crops, such as carrots
- Usually situated on top of the soil, which allows for earthworm activity
- No or very little construction required
- Price range (per bed): \$40–600+

how about plastic?

Raised plastic planters tend to be made from non-leaching UV stable recycled polypropylene, and can be set up over pavers, on concrete, or on balconies – ideal for renters. Be aware that some are rather shallow, so will struggle to accommodate deep-rooted vegetables.

Benefits of raised plastic planters

- Optional extras available, such as shade covers and stands to raise height
- Some include wicking systems for easier self-watering
- Usually self-contained, like a pot
- Very little construction required
- Price range (per bed): \$125–350+

try composite wood

This material is usually a blend of wood fibre and non-leaching plastic. Kits often feature black or brown panels with a wood-grain texture, which are resistant to warping, rot and termites. Many beds also have sturdy metal corner pieces.

Benefits of wood composite planters

- Modular kits available, so you can extend up and across to fit your space
- Usually situated on top of the soil, which allows for earthworm activity
- Some available with watering kits
- Very little construction required
- Price range (per bed): \$40–350+

get your fill

There are several ways to fill up your raised garden bed. Keep in mind that shallow-rooted crops, such as herbs and leafy vegetables, can be grown in as little as 30cm of soil, while pumpkins, tomatoes and other deep-rooted crops need at least 60cm. The depth can include the existing soil, so if your raised bed has an open bottom, dig over the ground below and incorporate compost to allow plant roots to venture in, if needed.

Most landscape suppliers sell soil mix for filling raised beds. Quality can vary, so consider growing something in a sample before committing to a large order. Boost any product you buy by adding extra compost.

The no-dig philosophy of layering different organic materials is good for filling many raised beds. Introduce consecutive layers of pea straw, grass clippings, lucerne and manure, wetting the layers well as you go. Finish off with a 10–20cm layer of compost plus mulch. The layers will slump over time, so top up with more organic materials as needed. **GA**

cooking with... cucumber

Stay as cool as the proverbial with these simple, refreshing and healthy recipes

salmon & pickled cucumber crisps

makes 12 pieces

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar | ¼ teaspoon chilli flakes |
| 2 teaspoons caster sugar | ¼ teaspoon paprika |
| 1 Lebanese cucumber, trimmed | 12 white corn tortilla strips |
| ½ medium avocado | 75g hot smoked salmon fillet, skin removed, flaked |
| 2 teaspoons lemon juice | coriander leaves, to garnish |

1 Place rice wine vinegar and sugar in a medium bowl; stir to dissolve sugar. Peel cucumber into long ribbons with a vegetable peeler, stopping when you reach the seeds. Add cucumber ribbons to vinegar bowl; toss to combine, then set aside for 5 minutes. Drain any excess liquid.

2 Meanwhile, place avocado, lemon juice, chilli flakes and paprika in a small bowl. Mash mixture until smooth.

3 Spread a little avocado mixture onto each tortilla strip, then top with some flaked salmon and a cucumber ribbon. Garnish each crisp with a coriander leaf then serve immediately.

portion tip

If you are having canapés before a main meal, stick to three or four pieces, but if they are your main meal, aim for six to eight pieces.



NO DAIRY

VEGE

LOW KJ

LOW SODIUM

Asian cucumber & carrot salad

serves 4 (as a side)

- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar**
2 tablespoons sweet chilli sauce
2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
1 small clove garlic, crushed
3 Lebanese cucumbers, halved lengthways, chopped into 5mm pieces
2 medium carrots, grated
⅓ cup fresh coriander leaves

1 Combine rice wine vinegar, sauce, ginger and garlic in a medium bowl. Add cucumber to vinegar mixture and leave to marinate for about 10 minutes.

2 Stir the grated carrot and coriander leaves through cucumber-vinegar mixture, just before serving.



NO DAIRY

LOW KJ

GLUTEN FREE

LOW FAT

LOW SODIUM

grilled scallops with spicy salsa

serves 12

1 small Lebanese cucumber, seeded, finely diced
100g peeled watermelon, finely diced
1 long red chilli, seeded, finely chopped

1 tablespoon mint, finely chopped
1 tablespoon chives, finely chopped
2 teaspoons lime juice
24 scallops, roe removed
1 tablespoon olive oil

1 Combine the diced cucumber, watermelon, chilli, herbs and lime juice in a medium bowl.

2 Brush scallops with olive oil and season with cracked black pepper. Heat a large chargrill pan or non-stick

frying pan over high heat. Cook scallops for 30 seconds each side, or cook to your liking, being careful not to overcook.

3 Place scallops on individual serving spoons; top with a teaspoon of spicy salsa, and serve immediately.



NO
DAIRY

DIABETES

LOW
FAT

GLUTEN
FREE

LOW
KJ

LOW
SODIUM

Pick me now



● **apricot** Look for yellow fruit that have developed an orange tint, and pick the ones that are firm, but not too hard. Apricots (*above*) that are ready continue to ripen up and sweeten off the tree. Try to handle them carefully because they bruise easily.

● **rockmelon** The first sign of ripeness is when patches of skin between the corky veins change from green to a golden colour. They will also give off a ripe scent. Gently lift the fruit – they should detach from their stem quite easily when they are ripe.

● **snow peas** Pick the seed pods when they are 8–10cm long, and the seeds inside are beginning to form small lumps on the surface. Don't let the seeds get too big or the snow peas will lose quality. Snap them off the plant with your thumb and forefinger.

Also in season

● Asian greens ● asparagus
 ● banana ● beans ● blackberry
 ● blueberry ● cabbage ● carrot
 ● celery ● cherry ● currants
 ● eggplant ● gooseberry
 ● honeydew ● lettuce ● lychee
 ● mango ● nectarine ● onion
 ● passionfruit ● pawpaw
 ● peach ● pineapple ● radish
 ● rambutan ● rocket ● silverbeet
 ● spring onion ● strawberry
 ● sweetcorn ● watermelon

These recipes come from previous issues of *Healthy Food Guide*, and are developed in consultation with a dietitian. healthyfoodguide.com.au

a month in the *Garden*

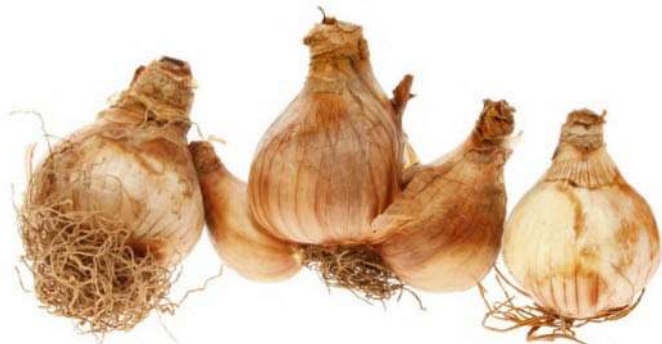
50 jobs
to do in
your action
planner

6 December
see
see
see

top job

dig up & divide daffodils

Now that daffodil foliage is starting to die and wither, it's an ideal time to dig up and divide clusters that have become too crowded. This is a good thing to do if you want to spread them out and increase your display of flowers in the future, or share some excess bulbs with friends. Dig around the outside of the clump and gently lift it out of the ground, being careful not to damage or cut into the bulbs. Shake off the excess soil then start dividing. Only separate the bulbs that come away easily – small bulbs that are clinging to the larger parent bulbs are best left in place to mature. Trim off the dead leaves and throw away any damaged bulbs. You can replant the divisions straightaway or, if you prefer, store them over summer and plant them in autumn. When storing, brush off the soil, put them in a mesh bag and keep them in a cool, dark, well-ventilated area.



grow quick radishes

Colourful, crisp and peppery, radishes are perfect for tossing into summer salads, and they are among the easiest of all edibles to grow. You don't need much room to grow them either – a little space on the edge of a garden bed or between rows of other vegies will do, and they are well-suited for growing in containers. These space-savers are rapid growers too, maturing in just 4–6 weeks from sowing. Sow the seed 5mm deep, directly where you want them to grow, and keep them moist – they will germinate in a few days. Make repeat sowings every fortnight to ensure an ongoing supply. There are lots of colours to choose from, including reds, yellows, pinks and whites, with long or round roots.

PHOTOS ISTOCK, ALAMY



IT'S TIME TO...

- Fill gaps with colourful warm-season bedding plants, including marigold, zinnia, celosia, portulaca, salvia and vinca
- Remove spent flowers on daisies and petunias to keep them looking fresh
- Prune felicia, viburnum, deutzia (*below*), mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*) and laburnum to shape after flowering
- Water outdoor potted plants daily, and twice a day on the hottest days
- Move your worm farm to a cool, shaded position to avoid subjecting worms to heat stress
- Lift and divide old clumps of bearded iris. Discard the larger central rhizomes and replant the remaining young rhizomes, trimming foliage into a fan shape to reduce moisture loss and transplant shock
- Trim hedges to tidy them up before Christmas
- Feed roses, gardenias, azaleas and hibiscus with a flower and fruit fertiliser to encourage rapid growth and improved flowering
- Cut back Floribunda roses by a third when they have finished blooming

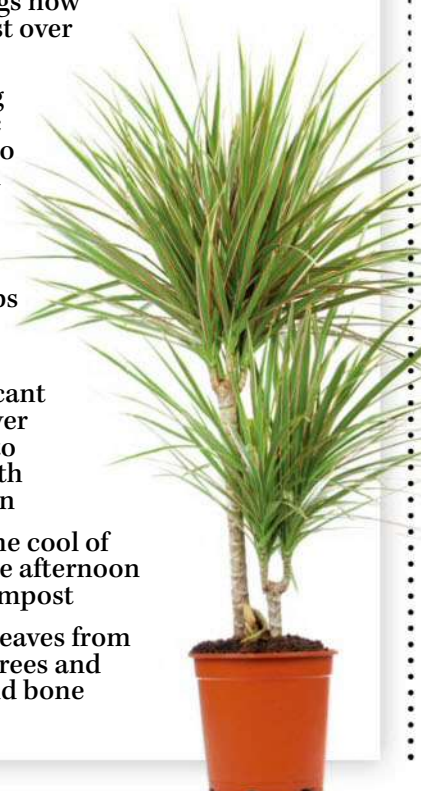


your planner



IN THE TROPICS

- Feed heliconias and gingers with compost and pelletised chicken manure, then cover the surrounding soil with mulch
- Wrap ripening pineapples in bird wire to ward off hungry rats and possums
- Cut back overgrown dracaenas (*below*) and cordylines, and increase your stock by planting the prunings directly in the ground – they will strike roots within weeks
- Plant okra seedlings now for a steady harvest over the wet season
- Change the setting on your automatic irrigation system to the manual switch for the wet season
- Prune hibiscus, mussaendas and other woody shrubs by a third, if they are a bit leggy
- Rake over your vacant vegie beds and cover them with mulch to reduce weed growth over the wet season
- Pull up weeds in the cool of the morning or late afternoon and toss on the compost
- Rake up diseased leaves from under frangipani trees and feed with blood and bone



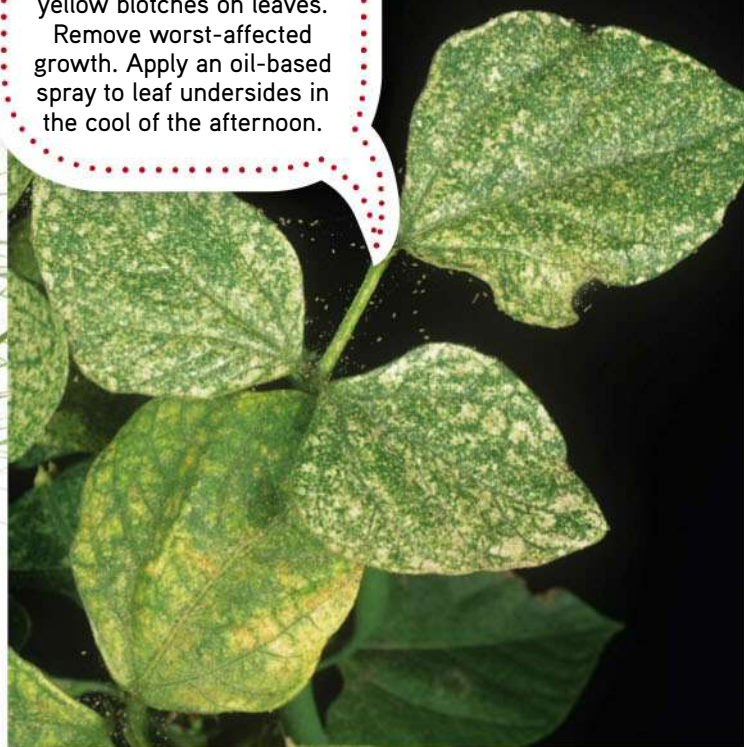
raise your mower

'Scalping' or cutting your lawn too low in summer greatly risks damaging the crowns and runners, stunting growth and leaving your lawn looking brown and patchy. The best thing that you can do for lawn health during summer months is to raise the height of the cutting deck on your mower. Letting the grass grow a little longer means there is greater leaf area for photosynthesis to take place, and thicker grass helps to outcompete weeds while shading the ground, reducing moisture loss from the soil.



pest alert!

Two-spotted mite (spider mite) causes tiny yellow blotches on leaves. Remove worst-affected growth. Apply an oil-based spray to leaf undersides in the cool of the afternoon.





hang in there

Hanging baskets really suffer in the hot weather, but establishing a good summer care routine will help minimise stress. Keeping them moist is the key. Where possible, move them to a sheltered spot that's protected from wind so they don't dry out so quickly, and if they are plants that like sunshine, choose a position that gets morning sun only – the afternoon sun is way too harsh. Make sure they are watered daily, or even twice a day when it's particularly hot, and dunk the whole basket in a solution of liquid fertiliser every fortnight. This replaces any leached nutrients and ensures the mix has been wetted right through.

For every kind of gardener



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your planner



top job

keep fruit trees watered

Summer fruits such as apple, pear, stone fruit, lychee (*below*) and fig (*bottom*) are all bearing, so make sure they're getting the moisture they need. Dry soils lead to problems that affect quality and yield, such as early fruit drop, dry fruit and fruit split, while waterlogging can make fruit watery and lead to root rot. In the heat, mature fruit trees need a good soaking at least every 10–14 days if there hasn't been significant rain. Target watering around the drip zone, directly below the outer edge of the canopy. Handwatering is fine, but it's well worth considering putting in drip irrigation lines to ensure slow, efficient delivery of water to the roots. Maintain a 5–10cm layer of mulch on the surface to help preserve soil moisture and reduce weed competition.

look out!

Black spot spoils roses, so bin or burn infected leaves.

To increase resistance, apply liquid seaweed and diluted fish emulsion to the remaining foliage.



harvest your corn

Spring-sown sweetcorn will have started producing cobs in many areas. Picked at the right time, these are delicious, but leave them on too long and the kernels become dry and starchy. Start keeping a close eye on your harvest when the silks at the tip of the cob turn brown. Every few days, peel back some of the husk, and puncture one of the kernels. If it releases a clear liquid, it's not quite ready. If there's no liquid, then it's too late – the cob has passed its best. When a milky liquid is released, the cob is perfect for picking. Grab the cob firmly and pull it down sharply with a twist to snap it off the plant. Corn will store in the fridge for up to a week, but for best flavour, eat soon after picking. If you have a glut, freeze the cobs or cut off the kernels and store them in zip-lock bags before freezing.

add summer aromas

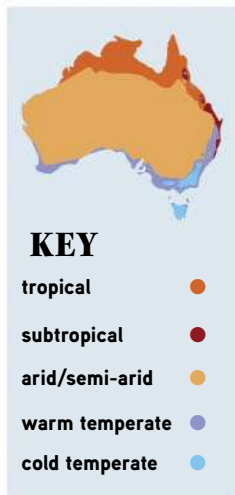
There's nothing quite like the sweet, heady scent of flowers drifting in on a light summer breeze. Adding a few scented plants near entertainment spaces could be just the thing to create that enchanted summer feeling on a balmy evening. Consider planting shrubs such as gardenias (*Gardenia* spp.), murrays (*Murraya paniculata*, *below*) and bouvardias (*Bouvardia* spp.), which are all versatile, or climbers such as star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) or Madagascar jasmine (*Stephanotis floribunda*), which can be trained onto a frame or over a pergola. Where space allows, think about a frangipani tree (*Plumeria* spp.) or *Magnolia champaca*, which will also offer shade to outdoor spaces on hot summer days.



sow & plant...

IN DECEMBER

Asian greens
basil
bean (French)
cabbage
capsicum
carrot
cucumber
dill
eggplant
ginger
lettuce
melon
okra
potato
pumpkin
rosella
sweetcorn
sweet potato
tomato
zucchini



EDIBLE GARDEN

- Sow heat-hardy snake beans in tropical, subtropical and arid areas
- Fertilise passionfruit vines with blood and bone and potash, spreading in a 1m radius from the trunk, and water in well
- Give tomatoes and zucchini (*above*) a regular deep watering and apply flower and fruit fertiliser
- Hang sticky yellow traps to attract and trap white fly, aphids and thrips
- Sow pawpaw seeds in pots of potting mix and plant out when they are 10–15cm tall
- Reduce water applied to watermelons (*below*) as they approach maturity, to concentrate sugars and improve their flavour
- Plant basil seedlings and, once they start to grow, feed with a high-nitrogen fertiliser
- Liquid-feed all your vegies fortnightly
- Protect fruit from fruit fly – bag the fruit, cover plants with fine weave exclusion netting, renew baits once a week, and keep applying organic sprays and lures
- Sow a follow-up crop of sweetcorn for a late-summer harvest
- Spray citrus with an oil-based spray to control scale and protect the new foliage from citrus leafminer



your planner



DO IT NOW

- Put some of your favourite flower or vegie seeds into tiny zip-lock bags and slip them into Christmas cards for gardening friends
- Tip-prune fast-growing shrubs to keep them bushy and compact
- Place indoor plants in the shower to wash off dust and mites from the foliage (*above*), and follow up with a fortnightly application of liquid fertiliser during the warmer months
- Tidy up tree ferns, cutting off any dead fronds flush with the main stems
- Apply a liquid lawn fertiliser product to turf areas to green them up for Christmas – this is best applied after rain
- Cut boronias and bottlebrush back by one-third after flowering
- Plant Peruvian lily (*Alstroemeria* spp., *below*) for a lovely show of warm season flowers
- Apply neem-based sprays to control grasshoppers on your ornamental plants
- Store cyclamen pots in a cool, dry spot until they're ready to break dormancy in autumn



top job

control rampant growth

Along with the summer heat comes a lot of strong, vigorous growth. Quick-growing climbers such as wisteria, honeysuckle, allamanda, star jasmine (*right*) and petrea become a mad clutter of tangled vines, and many shrubs left to their own devices quickly lose their compact shape as their stems rapidly extend. Some well-considered cuts this month will not only keep these plants confined, but will also save you a lot of work when new growth matures. The best approach with these spirited summer shrubs and vines is to prune a little and often. It's much easier to trim and shape soft new growth than to take on older stems once they're thick and woody. Whenever you see any wild growth, cut the exuberant stems back by at least half. Always make your cuts just above a leaf node to avoid leaving long stubs that may be prone to rot. Secateurs are the best tool for the job, but shears come in handy when there are lots of stems to cut, and a pole pruner is a good tool when you need that extra reach, as in the case of climbers and taller shrubs.

trim woody herbs

Perennial herbs such as rosemary, lavender (*right*), thyme and oregano benefit from a regular trim over summer. This helps to keep them compact and encourages lots of fresh tender regrowth – when you don't, they usually develop long woody stems that become leafless at their base. Don't waste the prunings, as these can be kept in paper bags to dry and store for use in the kitchen or potpourri, and longer cuttings can be used to propagate new plants.





A gift of gardening

Looking for a unique gift for a gardening friend that won't break the bank but will be truly appreciated? How about a gift voucher for a few hours' help in the garden?



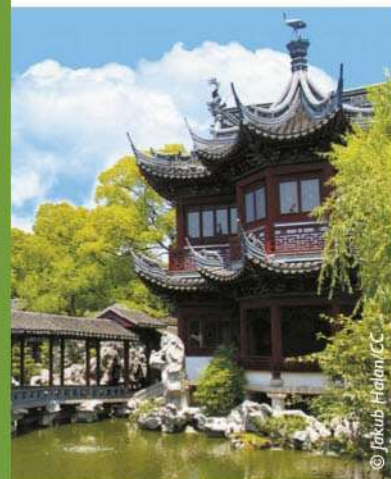
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garden guests & pests



Peacefully dozing and basking for much of the year, the eastern water dragon faces a stressful breeding season, with brutal battles for males and a fickle harem to guard, writes **LEONARD CRONIN**

Our local wildlife seems to have been in overdrive for the past few weeks. We've had to move pythons out of the car engine compartment and off the verandah rafters, our grevilleas are alive with bird life, cicadas electrify the evenings, and the water dragons keep drivers on their toes as they dodge cars on the road by the local creek.

Needless to say, the breeding season is in full swing, and this is a particularly busy and dangerous time for the eastern water dragon. Large, dominant males are determined to have exclusive mating rights with as many females as possible. They gather a harem of females inside their riverside territory and attempt to guard their fidelity from competitors.

This is a very stressful situation. Females tend to stray, and other males are eager to pit their strength against the incumbent male. Epic battles often ensue with rivals rearing up, charging, head-butting and biting each other. Deep wounds are inflicted, and older males often bear the scars of combat. The breeding season goes on for two to three months, finishing in January

when the last clutches of six to 18 soft-shelled eggs are safely stashed away in a sealed burrow beside the river.

In late January, we see the young lizards congregating along our creek or sunning themselves on the adjacent roadway. The juveniles are very alert and wary, springing up on their hind legs and dashing for cover as soon as they see you.

At other times of year, eastern water dragons spend much of the day sleeping and basking on branches overhanging the water. If disturbed, they jump in and swim with a snake-like motion, limbs held by the sides, pushing forward with the powerful, flattened tail. To avoid detection, water dragons can stay submerged for more than an hour.

Unlike most other dragons, they wander over large areas looking for food, enjoying an extraordinarily varied diet which includes insects, frogs, worms, mice, smaller lizards, flowers and fruit. They occasionally venture into our garden, and visitors to our region are often surprised and delighted to encounter these beautiful reptiles on coastal walks.

 **Len gardens in the Northern Rivers, New South Wales**



Eastern water dragon
Intellagama lesueurii lesueurii



a beetle so bright



Where are all the Christmas beetles?
MARTYN ROBINSON explains why
you might see fewer knocking around

Well, it just wouldn't be a proper Australian Christmas without seeing at least one Christmas beetle, would it? The trouble is, there aren't that many around – they're becoming quite uncommon in some areas of eastern Australia. The problem seems to relate to their life cycle and shrinking habitat.

A key difference between Christmas beetle larvae and the other curl grubs you dig up in the garden, is that Christmas beetles feed mainly on the roots of native grasses and bushland plants. As areas of flora are cleared for development, the grubs disappear and don't get to mature into adult beetles. Meanwhile, the eucalypts that supply foliage for the adults to feed on are also down in numbers, leaving fewer adults to lay eggs.

So if you do see any genuine, shiny, metallic-coloured Christmas beetles this month (as in, members of the genus *Anoplognathus*, not just any old beetle that turned up in December), then consider yourself lucky!

Martyn gardens mainly on Sydney's Northern Beaches

Q This spider visited our laundry one rainy night. Any idea of its name? I assume it's a trapdoor of some sort.

M Bunyan, Pittsworth, Qld

A Yes, it is a species of trapdoor spider. The smaller leg-like structures either side of the mouth are swollen at the ends, indicating it's a male. I would need to examine it to determine the exact species, as there are many that are similar. It can give a painful bite but, so far, no trapdoor species has ever caused a fatality.



Have you found something interesting in your garden? Send us a photo and Martyn will ID it. Email yoursay@gardeningaustralia.com.au with 'Creature' in the subject line.



let's hit the road

When you're heading off on a road trip with your pets, it's important to prepare well for their health and safety, writes DR ERICA STEPPAT

As the number of retirees increases annually, so does the number who are choosing to travel with their pets. So-called grey nomads are discovering that life in a caravan or motorhome feels much more like home with a furry friend by their side.

The tourism business is getting with the program, too. More and more caravan parks are allowing small pets, and domestic airlines allow you to check in pets as cargo. Some taxis even permit pets, if pre-warned.

Before heading off with your four-legged mate, it's important to do some health and safety checks.

vaccinations

Ensure your pet's vaccinations are up to date, as you may go to areas where there is parvovirus. This is more common in rural areas, where vaccination rates are lower. A harmful virus, parvovirus can live in soil for six months, causes a severe bloody diarrhoea and can be fatal, especially when pets are young.

If your dog will be socialising a lot with other dogs, it's important to offer her protection from kennel

cough. As with human flu jabs, the vaccine is not 100 per cent effective, but it's the strongest protection you can provide. All vaccines take at least a week to reach peak protection, so make sure you give any vaccines at least one to two weeks before travel. The kennel cough vaccine can be given by itself as a booster, so you may like to consider doing this, without giving the full annual C5 vaccine.

Of course, receiving a full health check at the time of vaccination will offer you peace of mind that a tooth root abscess or skin condition isn't looming. You may even like to consider having a cloud account for your pet: a file that you can access anywhere via the internet, containing vaccination certificates, the last blood test and even the last hip X-ray series.

test drive

If it's your first time taking a pet away, you may like to consider a short trial run first. Ensure that she is comfortable in the car or motorhome. Car sickness is common, especially in younger dogs. There is medication to help, but you want to know about this

"If it's your first time taking a pet away, you may like to consider a short trial run first"

before you leave. Also, does your pet howl at night, or bark more in strange places with strange noises? These are other important factors to consider.

On the day of travel, feed your pet only a light meal, or none at all. Dogs' digestive systems are different to ours, so a few hours without food won't do any harm.

stock up on supplies

Some animals have a very sensitive digestive tract and it may be important to keep your pet on the same food all the time. Also, remember that if your pet needs a special prescription diet, you will need to order ahead at a vet in the area you are visiting, and some clinics may not stock all the varieties.

If you run out of medication, you will need to visit a local vet and pay for a consult, or ring your vet and ask for a script to be emailed or faxed. It is illegal for vets to prescribe medications without registering and examining the pet. If you are planning to travel anywhere on the east coast of Australia, I would recommend having tick prevention on at all times... all year around. Tick paralysis can kill.

safety in the vehicle

Restraint is important! There are many forms of car harnesses and buckles to keep your pet safe. Your pet should not (unfortunately for her) be hanging her head out of windows. This isn't just because of the high risk of injury, but she can also get dry eye as a result, and that would mean a trip to the vet. Last but not least, never leave a pet alone in a vehicle.

Once you're on the road, offer plenty of toilet stops and lots of fresh water, and I am sure that your fur-family member will love the new smells and sights that he or she encounters each day. **GA**



Next month

Find out what caravan parks have to offer your four-legged travellers.

PHOTOS ISTOCK

new product

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letterbox

Readers share gardening experiences, top tips and photos. Enter this month's competition to win a Fiskars tree-pruner pack



pecking protection

I have three chooks who are excellent gardeners, but they don't distinguish well between plants and weeds. I'm using old wire baskets to protect my seedlings, and I add a row of pavers to lift them up as the plants grow taller.

A Clarke, via email

hanging out

We had the wonderful opportunity to see Uluru earlier this year, when it was raining heavily. Waterfalls were pouring off the rock, and water was running off into the desert. In some places, the creeks were ankle deep. Along the circumference walk of the rock, we came across an area of ants' nest openings, with ants hanging on to the high ground. They weren't building or moving eggs – they were just hanging on and hoping.

S Ruecroft, via email



step ahead

I complained to my husband that I needed more hanging space. His idea: suspend a broken ladder – now I have ample space for hanging baskets!

J Sleaman, via email



who is our facebook fan this month?

After reading our *Pets & Gardens* special (October issue), Donna Connors from Burpengary in Queensland shared a photo of Ambrosia the cat, whose favourite spot in the garden is next to the rosemary and thyme.



know your oats

Here's a tip I came across that helps to keep snails and slugs away naturally. Scatter some oatmeal around your plants – they seem to hate it. It's cheap to buy, and it eventually breaks down into the soil. Win, win!

A Cameron, Rowville, Vic



There are more organisms in
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healthy soil**
than there are people on earth.
The biodiversity of soil is being
celebrated on December 5,
World Soil Day.



join us on Instagram!

Our Instagram followers have been welcoming pollinators into their backyards. The poppies @pinkwheatcreative is growing are very popular, and @samanthasgarden is delighted her lavender is attracting visitors. Tag #gardeningaustraliamag to show off your pics or, for more inspiration, simply follow @gardeningaustraliamag.



verandah visitors

I was sitting on my verandah as I read Leonard Cronin's butcherbird article (*Garden guests & pests*) in the October issue of the magazine. I must say, the family of butcherbirds that come to visit us every day are just amazing and so entertaining to watch. They sing beautifully and keep snakes, mice and other pests away. They are always around when we are in the vegie patch, hoping for a grub or grasshopper. We have lived here for

more than four years, so we know the mum and dad well. Every November, they introduce us to their new babies – there are usually two or three of them. The babies from the previous year help teach the new ones, then they are moved on, which is sad, but that's just how it goes. The butcherbird in this photo is sunning itself on our verandah. We just love them, and I think the feeling is mutual.

T Cawthray, Booral, Qld



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to us...



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at [facebook.com/
ABCGardening
Australia](https://www.facebook.com/ABCGardeningAustralia) magazine



Got a great gardening tip or photo? Share it with us!
Email us at yoursay@gardeningaustralia.com.au or write
to Your Say, Gardening Australia, nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555,
St Leonards NSW 1590. Please note, letters may be edited for space
and clarity, and photos may be posted on our Facebook page.

WIN

1 of 3 Fiskars pruning packs

safe & easy

With its PowerReel mechanism and lightweight shaft, the Fiskars Telescopic Bypass Tree Pruner UP86 enables you to trim branches up to 6m high while staying safely on the ground. Unlike pruners of old, the rope is integrated inside the shaft, which makes for much easier handling. The cutting angle can be adjusted via a lever, so that you can trim dense shrubs at ground level as well as tree crowns.



Included in each prize is a Telescopic Bypass Tree Pruner (\$199), a Bypass Tree Pruner (\$119), a Saw Attachment (\$69) and a Fruit Picker Attachment (\$59).

We have three Fiskars tree-pruner packs to give away, worth \$446 each. To enter, tell us in 25 words or less: How do you like to stretch yourself in the garden? Write your name, address, contact number and entry on the back of an envelope and send to Tree Pruners, Gardening Australia, nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards NSW 1590 or email comp@gardeningaustralia.com.au, with 'Tree Pruners' in the subject line, by December 11.

great shot!

The theme for Your Photos in the October issue was 'Flying colours' and our inbox was bursting with vivid and striking interpretations. Enter this month to win a Seasol garden care hamper

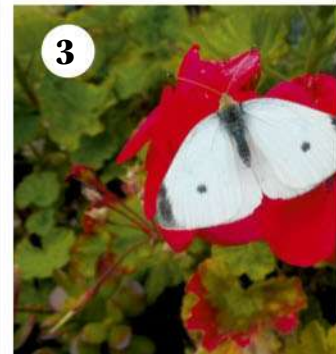
1. This eastern spinebill visits our grevillea every day, and has started to bring along its new family.
S Ford,
Fullerton Cove, NSW



2. I caught this beautiful green bottle fly perusing my parsley seed heads.
A Campbell,
Mt McEuen, Qld



3. I'm sure this is a pest, but if you stop and look, it is still a beautiful butterfly.
L Kopp, Spearwood, WA



4. A busy honeybee takes a closer look at one of the arum lilies in my garden.
L Martin, Armidale, NSW



5. A rainbow lorikeet flaps around the umbrella tree in my garden.
R Bleiker, St Lucia, Qld



6. After waiting five years, our *Puya Chilensis* has flowered for the first time – the honeyeaters love it.
D and I Hetherington,
Bolwarra Heights, NSW

8. I tied colourful shapes from an old decoration onto my garden windmill.
B Bone, Wentworth, NSW



7. This spring, we stayed in a New England property that was exploding with colour – all the flowers were covered in hoverflies.
B Robinson,
Albion Park, NSW

9. I'm fascinated by the bees and insects that visit my garden every day.
N Phelps,
Goonellabah, NSW





WIN
a Seasol
garden care
hamper
worth \$500



This month's theme is

blooming marvellous

Email your best garden-related photo as a high-res attachment (1-4MB in size) to comp@gardeningaustralia.com.au with the words 'blooming marvellous' in the subject line. Include your name, address and contact number. A selection of entries will be published in the February issue. The photo of the month wins a hamper filled with Seasol and PowerFeed products, gardening gloves and soap, plus two 10L bottles of Seasol The Seaweed Solution, four 3.5kg PowerFeed With Troforte packs and a 10L container of PowerFeed Plant Food. To find out more about the Seasol range, visit seasol.com.au

Competition starts on 14/11/16, 00:01 AEDT and closes on 5/12/16, 23:59 AEDT. Winners will be judged on 6/12/16 at 14:00 AEDT. The total prize is valued at \$500.

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ask our experts

Our gardening experts help to identify mystery plants, including a colourful groundcover and a succulent with a smelly flower

uninvited guest

Q I've been watching this plant grow in my vegie patch for a few months and have no idea what it is. I've taken leaves and shown photos to three nurseries and no-one can identify it. It's over 1m high with large leaves, and seems to be developing a flower. There are lots of birds in our yard, so perhaps it came from their droppings. Do you have any suggestions please?

D Alban, Eltham, Vic

A Looks like you have something from the Amaranth family, possibly *Amaranthus spinosus*, better known as spiny pigweed. This is a naturalised weed in many parts of Australia. It will grow anywhere there is a little moisture, and particularly likes a fertile vegie patch, where it absolutely thrives!

Tino Carnevale



baffling succulent

Q My mother had this unusual-looking plant growing in a pot for many years and I've continued to do so. I would be interested to know its name and origin.

I Loiterton, Dunlop, ACT



A This is a succulent called candle plant (*Senecio articulatus*), and it is native to South Africa's Cape region. It's a curious plant due to its thick, fleshy, blue-green stems with arrow-shaped markings, tufts of triangular leaves and yellowish flowers, which are a bit pongy and grow at the ends of the branches in winter. Keep looking after it!

Jennifer Stackhouse



hidden gem

Q Can you tell me what this is? Thank you.

Sarah, via Facebook

A This looks to me like an *Arum palaestinum*. It grows from a tuber and can remain hidden for months until spring, when it sends up a shoot with these amazing flowers. The deep mauve colour is quite mysterious. The flowers emit an odour that resembles rotting meat, which

attracts vinegar flies to assist in pollination. When it's dormant, dig up the fleshy tuber and replant it in a pot or in a place that's not being crowded out by the hydrangea. It likes a well-drained spot in full sun or semi-shade.

Jane Edmanson

Got a question?



Ask us on Facebook at [facebook.com/ABCGardeningAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/ABCGardeningAustralia)



Email questions to experts@gardeningaustralia.com.au or write to Experts, Gardening Australia, nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards NSW 1590. Please include your full name, suburb and state. Questions may be edited, and questions and photos may be posted on our Facebook page. Emailed photos must be between 1–5MB. There is no personal reply service for unpublished questions.



exotic beauty

Q This flowering plant is growing as a groundcover in a garden that faces east. It has just come out in a mass of blossom. Could you tell me about it?

J Bond, Ipswich, Qld

A This is *Lotus maculatus*, a trailing groundcover that hails from the Canary Islands. Its needle-like, grey-green leaves provide a lovely foil for the orange and red flowers. It only grows to about 20cm high, but will extend itself to almost 2m in the right environment. It's perfect for hanging baskets, or planted next to a retaining wall so it spills over the edge. It loves full sun and slightly acidic (5.5–6.5pH) well-drained soil. Propagate from cuttings in summer months.

Ally Jackson

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take a break!

Put the kettle on – it's time to relax. Solve our puzzle to be in the running to win a Holman gardener's starter pack



across

- 1.** Small flowering tree, *Ceratopetalum gummiferum* (9,4) **(PICTURE A)**
- 9.** Plant used to flavour beer (3)
- 11.** Kiss under the ... (9)
- 12.** Shrub of the genus *Ulex* (5)
- 13.** Widely cultivated cereal grass (3)
- 14.** *Osmunda regalis* or ...fern (5)
- 15.** Orange-coloured citrus fruit (7)
- 17.** A popular salad (6)
- 18.** A mass of fungal tissue with embedded spore-bearing structures (6)
- 20.** Stop, cease (6)
- 22.** Request; attraction (6)
- 24.** Climbing plant of the Smilacaceae family, some yielding sarsaparilla (6)
- 26.** The stonecrop *Sedum telephium* (6) **(PICTURE B)**

- 32.** A type of Mexican salamander (7)
- 33.** Plant used in Christmas decorations (5)
- 34.** Bristly growth on grasses (3)
- 36.** Small group of secret plotters (5)
- 37.** The wood of an East Indian tree, *Chloroxylon swietenia*, used for cabinetwork (9)
- 38.** Stinging insect (3)
- 39.** Grass-like plant *Blandfordia* that flowers this time of year (9,4) **(PICTURE C)**

down

- 1.** Group of tents (4)
- 2.** Public land set apart for recreation or other special purpose (7)
- 3.** Tall plants *Grevillea robusta*, with feathery foliage and golden flowers (5,4)
- 4.** Character, spirit (6)

- 5.** Perfumes (6)
- 6.** Pressing (6)
- 7.** Reap (7)
- 8.** Animal secretion that influences the behaviour of others of its species (9)
- 10.** Rind (4)
- 16.** Scrapes, shuffles (6)
- 19.** Napping (6)
- 21.** Pests (9)
- 23.** Public area around Adelaide, The ... (9)
- 25.** Relating to certain single-celled animals (7)
- 27.** Frozen confection on a stick (3,4)
- 28.** Something worn around the neck (6)
- 29.** Narrow-necked bottles (6)
- 30.** Pulse, beat (6)
- 31.** Deliberately hurtful remark (4)
- 35.** A false god (*Bible*) (4)

WIN

1 of 5

Holman gardener's starter packs

get a head start

This gardener's starter pack from Holman is designed to kickstart a summer garden. Seedlings can be grown in the GreenWall – Freestanding Benchtop Kit, then transferred into the 50x50cm Modular Raised Garden Bed. To help water your new garden, the prize includes a 30m OzHose with Grip 'n' Lock hose fittings. For more information about Holman products, visit holmanindustries.com.au



how to enter

We have five Holman gardener's starter packs, valued at \$139 each, to be won. To enter, unscramble the highlighted letters in the crossword (opposite) and email your answer to comp@gardeningaustralia.com.au by December 5. Put 'Holman starter pack' in the subject line and include your name, address and daytime contact number.

WINNERS

Fiskars Weed Puller (September 2016) S Buehner, Ballarat, Vic; P Amedee, Burwood, NSW; D Bates, Yoogali, NSW; K Martini, Belgian Gardens, Qld; M Hills, Glen Iris, Vic. **Hozelock Easy Drip set (September 2016)** C Naran, Camira, Qld, J Ellis, Tathra, NSW; R Hall, Redcliffe, Qld; J Barden, Black Mountain, Qld.

solution November 2016 crossword

F	O	R	E	S	T	E	D	T	R	E	L	L	I	S
U	O	U	A	I	L	E	N							
C	O	S	T	M	A	R	Y	M	A	Y	T	E	A	K
H	E	U	B	U	L	B	S	T	A	K				
S	W	A	M	P	G	U	M	E	P	I	C	U	R	E
I	P			D				R	A	C	B			
A	L	P	I	N	E				N	E	E	D	E	D
	L	A							A		A			
	Y	E	A	S	T				G	R	A	I	N	
	A		H						T	S				
A	C	A	C	I	A				C	H	I	L	L	I
H	A	L		M				F		A	C			
S	T	A	P	E	L	I	A	S	I	X	P	E	N	C
S	S	H	N	I	P	A	A	A	D	L				
E	M	I	T	E	G	G		A	N	A	T	H	E	M
	E	A	A	O				C	I	R	N			
N	O	N	P	L	U	S		D	E	L	O	U	S	E

November's unscrambled word: pollination



TV

November 12

Tino Carnevale hits the Patch to prep soil and plant his favourite tomatoes; Costa Georgiadis gives tips for decreasing the garden's mozzie population; John Patrick profiles five native Christmas tree alternatives; Sophie Thomson starts growing gifts that keep on giving; and Jerry Coleby-Williams figuratively travels the world, exploring a sprawling tropical garden.

To view previous episodes of the show, visit iview.abc.net.au.

summer viewing

Keep an eye on your TV guide as episodes of *Gardening Australia* will be repeated over the summer – plus you can watch stories on the website and iview. The new series returns next year on March 5.

radio

For details of programs on your local ABC station, call 139 994 or visit abc.net.au/local

ACT

666 ABC Canberra
Saturday 8.30–10am

NSW

92.5 ABC Central Coast
Saturday 9–9.30am
ABC Mid North Coast
Wednesday 10.30–11am,
Saturday 9.30–10am
1233 ABC Newcastle
Saturday 9–9.30am
ABC New England North West
Thursday 9.30am, Saturday 8.30am
ABC North Coast
Saturday 8.30–9.30am
ABC Riverina
Wednesday 10.30–11am,
Saturday 8.30–9am
ABC Central West
Saturday 8.30am
ABC South East
Wednesday 10.05–10.30am,
Saturday 9.05–10am
702 ABC Sydney
Saturday 9–9.30am
ABC Western Plains
Thursday 9.35am fortnightly,
Saturday 8.30–9am
973 ABC Illawarra
Saturday 8.30–9.30am

NT

783 ABC Alice Springs;
106.1 ABC Tennant Creek
Saturday 8.30–9am
105.7 ABC Darwin
Saturday 9–9.30am

QLD

612 ABC Brisbane
Saturday 6–7am
ABC Capricornia; 630 ABC
North Qld; ABC North West
Qld; ABC Tropical North; ABC
Western Qld; ABC Wide Bay
Friday 10–11am
91.7 ABC Gold Coast;
ABC Southern Qld
Saturday 9–10am
ABC Far North
Friday 10–11am, Saturday 8.30–9am

SA

Statewide
Sunday 10.30am
891 ABC Adelaide;
1485 ABC Eyre
Peninsula & West Coast;
639 ABC North & West;
ABC South East
Saturday 8.30am
999 ABC Broken Hill;
1062 ABC Riverland
Saturday 9am

TAS

936 ABC Hobart;
ABC Northern Tasmania
Saturday 9–10am

VIC

774 ABC Melbourne;
Local Radio Victoria
Saturday 9.30am
ABC Ballarat
Wednesday 6.40am
monthly, Thursday
10am fortnightly
1602 ABC South
West Victoria
Thursday 7.20am fortnightly
ABC Central
Victoria
Thursday 7.35am fortnightly
Alternate Thursday 10–10.30am
fortnightly
594 ABC Western
Victoria
Tuesday 9.10am
ABC Mildura – Swan Hill
Thursday 10–10.30am fortnightly
ABC Gippsland
Monday 10–10.30am
ABC Goulburn Murray
Tuesday 10.05–10.30am

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Southern; ABC South West;
ABC Goldfields Esperance; ABC
Kimberley; ABC North West;
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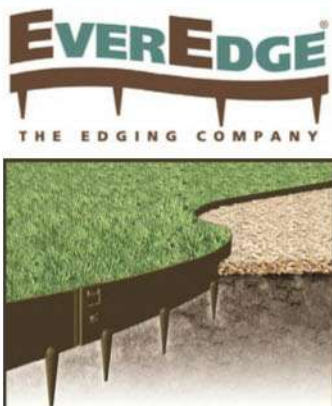


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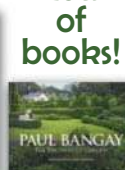


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the big picture

choosing favourites

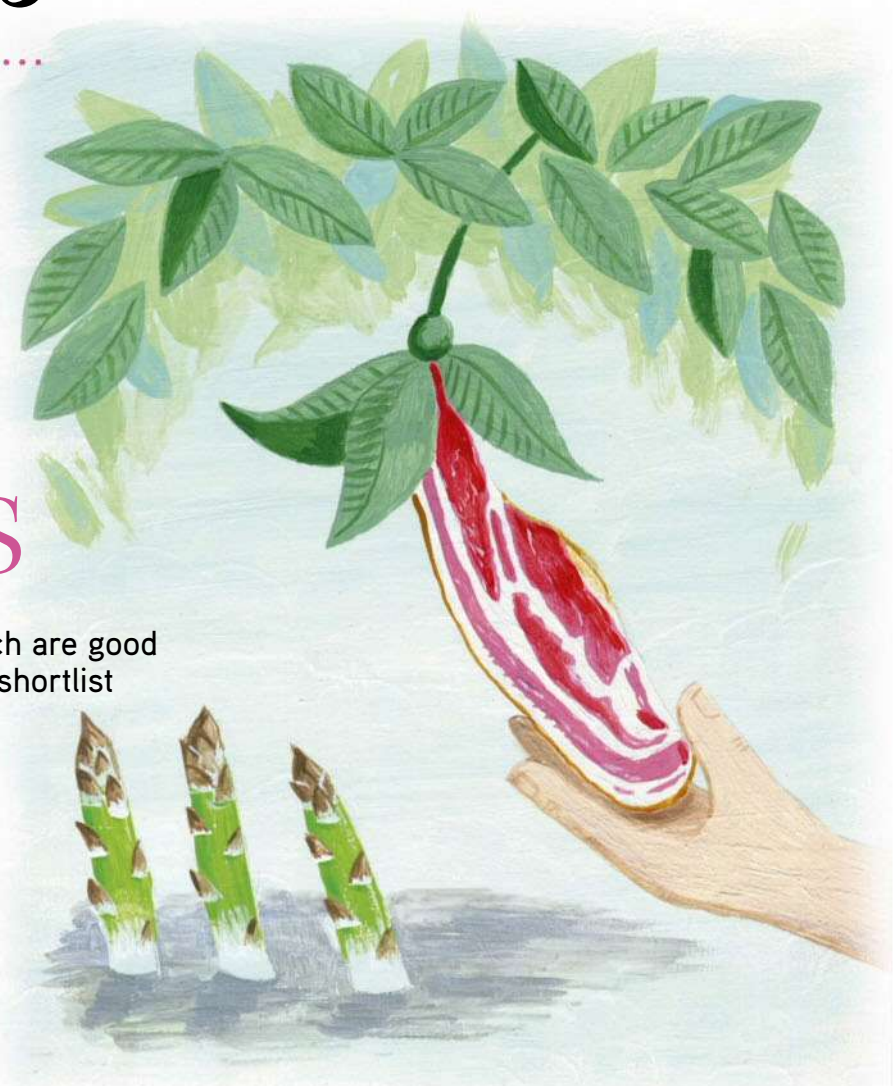
Which foods are good to grow and which are good to eat? MICHAEL McCOY draws up his shortlist

A few months back I was interviewing a dedicated vegie-growing family about their produce. I asked a three-year-old what her favourite vegetable was. She thought about it for a while, then emphatically answered “bacon”. If I were answering the same question, I’d have to clarify whether it was about my favourite vegetable to grow, or my favourite vegetable to eat.

To the latter question, I’d have to honestly but reluctantly answer that it is potatoes. Particularly since I started using this Greek roast potato recipe from the internet, in which wedges of potato are tossed in oil and water (yes water!) and countless cloves of crushed garlic. The result is a fluffy inside and an almost sticky-crunchy carapace of caramelisation. They’re stupendously good. If the kids (all bordering on adults) are told that we’re having potatoes, the immediate follow-up question is “Yummy potatoes (as above) or yucky potatoes?” (which covers all other sorts).

But potatoes are nowhere near my favourite vegetable to grow. I love the challenge of getting perfect germination from carrots, and then occasionally pulling one, or rubbing the soil from a young plant’s shoulders to see how it’s advancing. They’re great fun to pick of course, as it’s such a lucky dip. You never know quite what’s going to emerge. This surprise-factor is so high that kids will pick the entire crop if you don’t stop them.

And I love growing the side-sprouting forms of broccoli. There’s something really satisfying about snapping off loads of broccolini-sized shoots. No need for a cutting tool of any sort. It’s a bonus



that they don’t require any further preparation in the kitchen, and take only a couple of minutes’ steaming.

But my favourite vegetable to grow is (like much good gardening) as yet planted only in my imagination. I can’t shake this childhood memory of Leo McKern

“If bacon were a vegetable, it would probably be my favourite”

as Rumpole in *Rumpole of the Bailey*, muttering in that rich, old smoky voice of his: “And in the fullness of time... asparagus!” And I don’t know if he implanted the idea, or just nailed an idea already well-germinated in my brain, but I know that there’ll come a day, in the fullness of time, when there’ll be asparagus in my garden.

Having said all that, if bacon were a vegetable, it would probably be my favourite too. **GA**

Michael blogs at thegardenist.com.au

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